French Sufi Theopolitics
On the Appropriation of the Akbarian Concepts of God's Unity, Law and Perfect Man by French Modern Perennialists.

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Abstract:

> *In short, my Lord, I think that the melancholy way*
> *of treating religion is what leads it to produce*
> *such dismal tragedies in the world*.
> Lord Shaftesbury, Letter Concerning Enthusiasm
> (1708).

This dissertation examines the reception of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) by major Francophone Perennialist intellectuals of the twentieth century through an analysis of how they have integrated his teachings into their theopolitical views.

The works of René Guénon (1888-1951), Michel Valsan (1911-1974) and Henry Corbin (1903-1978) are here discussed in light of their appropriation of Ibn'Arabī 's views on God's Unity, the Law and the Perfect Man. In addition, this research also considers the historical reasons why the rector of Al Azhar 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd (1910-1978) has stamped Guénon and Valsan's philosophical views with the label "Islamic Orthodoxy." In showing the main differences between the earliest systematization of Ibn'Arabī's theopolitical insights by his immediate heir Sadr ud-dīn Qūnawī (1209-1274) and those undertaken by French Sufi Perennialists, this study traces the early modern genealogies of the French Sufi Perennialist episteme (popular Spinozism, post-Sabbatianism, and the Martinist interpretation of the Christian Kabbalah). Finally, this dissertation clarifies the process by which the French Sufi Perennialist Doctrine *feminizes* both Judaism and Islam in order for the latter to symbolically fit the *masculine* teachings of a neo-Hindu interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta.

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0.0 Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the reception of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) by major Francophone Perennialist intellectuals of the twentieth century through an examination of how they have integrated his teachings into their theopolitical views. Theopolitics here designates the representation by a religious community of how God rules the cosmos and human society. In order to grasp the historical process by which French modern interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī have understood him throughout the 20th century, this dissertation uncovers the multiple genealogies behind the modern French reception of Ibn 'Arabī as well as the procedures by which this same modern reception excludes from its discourse[1], the very first systematization of Ibn 'Arabī's insights by his stepson, Sadr Din Qūnawī (1209-1274). Qūnawī (1209-1274) was not only taught how to walk on the path to God by the Sufi master himself,[2] but also received, in 1232 from his Andalusian stepfather, an authorization to teach the whole of his oeuvre.[3] Accordingly, this dissertation treats Qūnawī's teachings as those that might well have been the closest to the meanings Ibn 'Arabī wished to convey in his writings.

The most striking difference between medieval interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī 's theopolitics and those of modern Perennialists has been already stated by Gregory Lipton in his groundbreaking book *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī*. Lipton notes that "in sharp contrast to the Perennialist notion of the 'universal validity' of religions, here the spiritual

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[1] Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, "The Field of Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 27.

[2] Marco Golfetto, "Some Preliminary Remarks on Evkaf Musesi 1933, a Copy of Ibn 'Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam by the Hand of Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi", *MediaevalSofia*, 10 (2011), 196-207

[3] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 17.

efficacy of Judaism and Christianity appears to be determined by obedience to the revelation of Muhammad rather than any particular validity that Ibn 'Arabī grants to the Torah or Gospel."[4] In other words, there where a modern interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī sees him as an expression of a perennial and universal truth that is hidden beyond and above all formal traditions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism), medieval heirs of Ibn 'Arabī see him as an expression of the authority of Islam over all other pre-Islamic religions that are qualified as "vain and abrogated", as in Qūnawī's words: „"Islam is the path of the Truthful after He sent Muhammad. With Muhammad, the truth has come, and all that is not Islam is abrogated (*mansuḫ*) and vain (*baṭil*)."[5] A theological study would dive into the hermeneutics of the Qur'an and sustain either one of these two positions - i.e., modern universalism or medieval supersessionism [6] - but this is not what I am interested in. Rather, from the perspective of religious studies, what is needed is an investigation of those processes by which Ibn 'Arabī's name is involved in the construction of a modern theopolitical interpretation of his teachings.

On the basis of the above, my main hypothesis is the following:

French Sufi Perennialists presented the teachings of the school of Ibn 'Arabī in a

way that fit their modern theopolitical views on the authority they ascribe to the Islamic

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[4] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9.

[5] Ṣadr ud-dīn Qūnawī, *Ijaz fi Tafsīr Umm Al Qur'an* (Beirut: Kitab al Ilmiyah, 2005), 219. This sentence is discussed below, see 1.4 Qūnawī on the Abrogative Character of Islam.

[6] A similar debate is based on the definitions of the word *vain/false* (*baṭil*) and Ibn 'Arabī's enigmatic passages on abrogation. For a philological and well-documented critique of Sufi Perennialism from a theological standpoint, see: Gabriel Haddad, "The Study Qur'an review," review of *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (2015), in *The Muslim World Book Review*, 36, no.3 (2016): 20-25. For a purely theological discussion, see Nuh Ha Mim Keller, On the Validity of all Religions in the Thought of Ibn Al-`Arabi and Emir `Abd al-Qadir: A Letter to 'Abd al-Matin (1996) published on Seekersguidance.com, retrieved on May 8th, 2019: https://www.seekersguidance.org/answers/islamic-belief/universal-validity-of-religions-and-the-issue-of-takfir/. A Sufi perennialist answer to Keller's arguments can be found in an article of Paolo Urizzi. See: Paolo Urizzi, Ibn 'Arabī et la Question du Pluralisme Religieux, published on Le Porteur de Savoir, retrieved on May 8th, 2019: https://leporteurdesavoir.fr/ibn-arabi-et-la-question-du-pluralisme-religieux-paolo-urizzi.

tradition.

In France, the presentation of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings is often coupled with an explanation of an Islamic Perennialist doctrine, according to which all exoteric religions and traditional wisdoms point to an esoteric eternal and universal truth that can be intellectually and mystically known by practicing Islamic and Sufi rituals. Four major Francophone Perennialist interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī have built the French Sufi Perennialist episteme.

René Guénon (1886-1951) is the first intellectual discussed in this dissertation. He laid the foundations upon which later generations have built their understanding of French-speaking Perennialist Akbarian Sufism. He saw in Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism a spiritual power that has the capacity to regenerate the decadent West. Guénon believed that in modern times the West has lost its vital and esoteric connection to those wise men who belong to a realm that is above all exoteric religions and wisdoms.

'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd (1910‑1978) is the second scholar studied in this dissertation. The Egyptian shaykh and rector of al-Azhar, the main theological university of the Sunni world, endorsed Guénon's philosophy as being Islamically "Orthodox." French converts to a form of guénonian Sufism often rely on Mahmūd's articles to present their version of Islam[7] as "traditional" and therefore untouched by the contingencies of

history   and   individual   passions.   Mahmūd perceived Guénon's Sufism as a philosophical confirmation of the need for

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[7] see for instance Abdal Halim Mahmud, *Un Soufi d'Occident*, trans. Abdal Wadud Jean Gouraud (Beirut: Al Bouraq, 2007), 182 pages. In his Foreword, Gouraud writes: "Le portrait que le Dr. 'Abd-al- Halîm Mahmûd trace du Shaykh 'Abd-al-Wâhid Yahyâ reflète particulièrement le degré de transparence et de présence à Dieu qui est le propre de la sainteté et de la servitude spirituelle." 'Abd-al-Wâhid Yahyâ is René Guénon's islamic name. The same sentence appears in a paper presented at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, by Yahya Sergio Pallavicini, Le Renouveau de l'Intellectualité islamique en Orient et Occident, http://elazhar.net/first/21/m2/18.pdf, accessed on August 19th, 2019.

Egyptian Sufism to leave behind a popular form of Sufism and start practicing an intellectual and reformed type of mysticism that is promoted both by the university of Al-Azhar and the Egyptian State.

Michel Valsan (1911-1974) is the third philosopher examined in this dissertation. He was the main heir of Guénon in France and the first to establish a coherent Sufi doctrine that combines the perennialist philosophy of Guénon with teachings of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabī. He also led a Sufi house of prayer from the 1950s to the 1970s that welcomed approximately one hundred devoted disciples, which is a significant number even for a Sufi lodge in the Arab world.[8] Valsan saw in Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism those teachings needed to establish a European esoteric authority that would rule over Free- Mason lodges and European indigenous spiritualities at the very end of times.

The Orientalist and specialist of Persian philosophy Henry Corbin (1903-1978) is the last scholar examined in this dissertation. He was the principle academic to achieve a wide diffusion of the speculations of Islamic mystics through his books and radio interviews. Corbin understood Ibn 'Arabī's teachings as a powerful answer to the hegemony of modern social sciences (e.g., sociology, historicism) that have - in his view - severed mankind from its relation to the hidden Godhead.

0.1 The LEADING QUESTIONS OF THIS DISSERTATION

In order to examine the appropriation of Ibn 'Arabī's name by the theopolitical views of French Sufi Perennialists, I divide the dissertation in two parts. The first is an analysis of the aforementioned four scholars who were influential in building a coherent French Sufi philosophical doctrine and spiritual practice, and asks two questions to each

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[8] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

of them: 1) What are the European traditions used by the scholars here studied to integrate Ibn 'Arabī in their worldviews? 2) How is the name of Ibn 'Arabī included in their respective theopolitical views?

The second part provides an analysis of the answers to these two questions. In fact, French Sufi Perennialists' metaphysical speculations belong to a specific historical context that needs to be questioned. Specifically, philosophically speaking, what is the historical episteme[9] to which French Sufi Perennialism ultimately belongs? The answer to this inquiry should help us formulate an answer to the following question: Are the religious beliefs[10] their thoughts and practices (a form of Islamic Sufism ascribed to the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī) perform identical to the undiscussed axioms that form the episteme of their thoughts? Finally, if there is a difference between the general frame of their thoughts and the performance of their Sufi beliefs, we should be able to analyze the nature of the metaphors used to relate the pre-modern Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī to the modern European episteme. For instance, are these sexual or martial metaphors? This should help us establish a conclusive answer to the following question: What is the drive that animates their desire to refashion or *reorient[11]* the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī *toward their own theopolitical views*?

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[9] Alain De Libera, *L'Art des Généralités* (Paris: Aubier, 1999), 624; see also R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), chap. 5.

[10] François Gauthier, "Religieux, Religion, Religiosité," *Revue du MAUSS*, no. 49 (2017): 167-184.

[11] Gil Anidjar, "Jewish Mysticism, Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the 'Zohar of Christian Spain,'" *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 3, no. 1 (Autumn, 1996): 89-157.

0.2 Theopolitics in an Islamic context

In order to answer the question of how French modern interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī have included him inside their own theopolitical worldviews, we need to know what the fundamental elements of a theopolitical worldview inside an Islamic context are.

The term "political theology" first appeared in a pamphlet by the anarchist Mikhael Bakunin (1814-1876), *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International* (1871), in which he argued that the idea of God coupled with the idea of political liberty, is the ground upon which the bourgeoisie builds its exploitation of the proletariat. A few years later, the Catholic philosopher of law Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) gave this notion of "political theology" its first strong conceptual basis: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."[12]
Yet, what is of most interest for this dissertation is the heuristic use of the term of "political theology" that the Italian historian of religions, Giovanni Filoramo, makes throughout his work. Filoramo defines the study of "political theology" as

> The historical and political study of the way theological concepts and representations of the divine in a particular religious tradition correspond with the forms and the dynamics of a particular structure of power and political authority. All this has two basic meanings: 1) the way political structures are mirrored in theological conceptions; 2) and vice versa, *the way theological conceptions must be shaped in order to provide proper representations of divinity and sovereignty*. The element that mediates

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[12] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1985), 36.

between these trends is the religious community which is, at one time, the privileged subject and object of political theology.[13]

In other words, the study of theopolitics[14] involves the analysis of how the connection between God's divinity and God's sovereignty establishes a set of rules and beliefs which are embedded in the different representations that a community of believers has of how God rules the world, and, subsequently, of what the characteristics of a just ruler ought to be.

The way of constructing the image of a just ruler has a history in Islam that needs to be briefly presented. After the death of Uthman, the third rightly guided Caliph, a civil war brought the partisans of Ali Ibn Abu Talib (601-661), against those who opposed him becoming Uthman's successor. Ali also named the last rightly guided Caliph by Sunni Muslims, was killed by one of his partisans a few years later. These partisans, known as the Kharijites, believed that Ali had accepted a purely human consultation on who should be Caliph, and thus ultimately betrayed God's absolute sovereignty. With the death of the last charismatic guide, the Islamic community was left with a series of theopolitical paradoxes that still haunts its intellectual productions today. As Andrew F. March explains:

What is divine sovereignty? What does it mean for *God alone to rule*? How can the sacral community uphold both obligation *to obey the Imam of Guidance* even unto the death and the obligation *to obey only God through His*

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[13] Giovanni Filoramo, *Che cos'è la Religione* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), 347, quoted by Massimo Campanini, al-Fārābī and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam, in Afsaruddin A. ed. *Islam, the State, and Political Authority. Middle East Today* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 35-52. Emphasis is mine.

[14] For the purpose of clarity, theopolitics and political theology are here treated as synonyms.

Law? If the community must have, not only for political but also for salvific purposes, the right Imam of Guidance, but the man is bound by the law, who then decides what the law is and when it has been violated?[15]

Accordingly, we can then state that the three fundamental features of a theopolitical worldview inside an Islamic context are:

- God's Unity

- God's Law

- God's Perfect Human Being i.e., he who by actualizing all the spiritual and political perfections has become God's vicegerent on earth (Qur'an 2:30).

Therefore, if we wish to study the historical process by which French modern interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī have constructed a Perennialist lens to translate his pre-modern teachings into a modern French language, we need to scrutinize how they have related Ibn 'Arabī s name to their own uses of these three fundamental theopolitical features.

0.3 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The first chapter is an overview of the theopolitical views of Ibn 'Arabī's heir, Qūnawī. Ibn 'Arabī's books are too eclectic and enigmatic to give a solid idea of what his theopolitical views were. Chittick, writes,

> By the time of his death, Qūnawī was recognized as a major transmitter of the teachings of al-Shaykh al-Akbar. His main contribution seems to be that he gave Ibn 'Arabī's teachings a structured coherence that largely determined the way they were read by later generations. Although his books are relatively short, they

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[15] Andrew F. March, Geneaologies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Theology, *Social Research,* 8, no.1 (Spring 2013): 292-320. Emphasis is mine.

are much more systematic than those of his master and focus on certain key issues that became the linchpins of subsequent discussions.[16]

Ibn 'Arabī's stepchild endeavored to systematize his father's thoughts to convey them to an audience that would carry them in the four geographical directions of the Islamic world (Persia, Morocco, Syria and Egypt) of the thirteenth century. I thus present Qūnawī's ideas on God's Unity, God's Law and the metaphysical identity of the Perfect Human Being.

Whereas this dissertation is not an examination of Qūnawī's philosophy, a survey of his teachings is needed to understand the nature of the original Sufi conceptions (in the historical sense of this word) that French Sufi Perennialists dealt with when they evoked the name of Ibn 'Arabī. It can be said that Qūnawī and Guénon's legacies had similar tasks: to bring order to the eclectic and scattered teachings of Ibn 'Arabī and allow them to be easily transmitted to a circle of scholars who felt attached to Shaykh al-Akbar's insights.

In the following chapters, I then ask the same question to René Guénon and his intellectual legacy ('Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, Michel Valsan, Henry Corbin): *How have they integrated Ibn 'Arabī's name into their theopolitical views?*

Each chapter is divided into four parts, beginning with a biographical section on each scholar describing the life of the intellectual considered, and the spiritual traditions that influenced his thinking. This is followed by a description of the state of the studies devoted to the figure presented in the chapter. A third section describes the European

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[16] William Chittick, "The Central Point – Qūnawî," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* 35 (2004): 26.

traditions involved in the apprehension of Ibn 'Arabī's name by the studied author. A fourth and final part examines the theopolitical features structured around Ibn 'Arabī's name: God's Unity, God's Law, and God's Perfect Human Being.

Following a chronological order, I begin with the chapter on Guénon, in which I introduce the reader to the foundations of French-speaking Sufism in the twentieth century and the ambiguities that had to be settled in his legacy so as to enable a Guénonian doctrine to emerge from his scattered letters and articles. At the end of the chapter, I dive into Guénon's texts and analyze his use of the Islamic notion of *Tawhid*, (God's oneness) and its relation to the concept of Law and the Perfect Human Being (who Guénon also names the "universal human being").

Guénon's acceptance by the French Muslim community could not have been successful without the support given to his teachings by the rector of al-Azhar, 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd. The leading questions characterizing the second chapter are: In what ways did 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd find an echo of his philosophical program in the writings of Guénon? To what extent does his philosophy legitimate or depart from Guénon's theopolitical act of reframing the name of Ibn 'Arabī?

I first present 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd's biography and what he perceived as his mission—to convey a reformed Sufism to a new urban bourgeoisie in Cairo. I argue in this chapter that Mahmūd welcomed Guénon's philosophy in an epistemic social context imbued by the revival of neo-Kalam philosophy and the quest to rationalize Sufi practices and beliefs in Cairo. Nonetheless, Mahmūd underwent an existential conversion to Sufism in the 1960s when he met his Sufi master in the countryside. This conversion prompted him to move out of his previous urban atmosphere of the Nahḍah. During these years,

Mahmūd wrote a short chapter in defense of his belief in the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wūjūd*) that strongly differs from Guénon's views on this matter.

Once I have presented and carefully evaluated Guénon's use of Sufi words and the reason Guénon's philosophy is approved by the religious authority of 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, the subsequent chapter then focuses on Michel Valsan.
The French and Romanian shaykh shaped a Guénonian form of Sufism tied to the practice of Sharīʿah on one side and the relationship between Guénon's teachings and the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī on the other. The heart of this chapter consists of a careful analysis of Valsan's translation of a short text by Qūnawī that allows me to argue in favor of the idea that Freemasonry and a modern interpretation of the Hermetic tradition are the main sources of the categories that Valsan uses to reorganize Islamic knowledge to make it comprehensible for his readers.

The last chapter is devoted to the French Orientalist and esotericist Henry Corbin (1903-1978). Corbin translated the words of many classical Persian philosophers into French. Furthermore, Corbin's work also had an important influence outside of academia. His book on Ibn ʿArabī, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn'Arabi* (1958), is his most famous. I analyze this book by showing how Corbin approximates Ibn 'Arabī's insights to the philosophy of religion established by the Lutheran scholar Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788). Moreover, Corbin was an initiated Freemason and sought to transform his speculative teachings into a practical curriculum that would be taught in Masonic lodges. His travel to the mythical birthplace of Freemasonry filled him with enthusiasm and, according to his colleague and anthropologist Gilbert Durant, prepared

him for his death.[17] A few years earlier (1970-1971), Corbin initiated - inside the Anglican Church of Paris - Durant to a Martinist form of Freemasonry. The ritual of a Free-Mason initiation inside an Anglican Church in Paris describes very well the cultural and spiritual atmosphere in which Corbin taught his personal theopolitical intepretation of Ibn'Arabī to a few selected students. In fact, I aim to prove in the chapter that the French Orientalist transformed the Andalusian mystic into a Lutheran and Christian Kabbalist philosopher.

The last chapter of this dissertation includes a theoretical discussion on the philosophical coherence of a religious doctrine. Whereas in the previous chapters, I show the individual traditions that inform the reception of classical Sufism by four French Perennialist authors, the final chapter uncovers the general epistemological frame of French Sufi Perennialism as well as its historical foundation.

I contend that by combining the anthropological categories of François Gauthier with the methodology developed by historian of medieval philosophy Alain de Libera, it is possible to distinguish the few unquestionable axioms of a given religion (as believed in by a specific group of people) from the performance of discussions regarding how a religious belief is put into practice. Finally, I bring together all the arguments of this dissertation by showing how an 18th century Christian antinomian trend informs the anti-Semitic practice of dragging Ibn 'Arabī's name into the episteme of French Sufi Perennialists.

The conclusion of this dissertation discusses the modern character of French Sufi Perennialism by confronting positions on the theopolitics of modernity by Jan Assmann

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[17] Gilbert Durant, La pensée d'Henry Corbin et le temple Maçonnique, forward to Henry Corbin, *Temple et Contemplation* (Paris: Entrelacs, 2006), 9-21.

and Leo Strauss. Is modernity foremost Christian and also Hermetic or rather foremost Hermetic and secondly Christian?

This final question establishes a link between modernity and Hermeticism in the sense that the Hermetic tradition has received along the centuries different meanings. In medieval times it refers mainly to a pre-christian magical and cosmological wisdom in which an explanation of the mystery of the Trinity can be found, whereas since the Renaissance, the doctrine of Hermes has designated a higher mystical truth that is transmitted from generation to generation since time immemorial. [18] The meaning of Hermeticism depends then on the historical and social context in which this tradition is referred to. This is then the reason why it is important to present the historical context in which the French Sufi Perennialist episteme has been established.

0.4 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT IN WHICH FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALISM HAS OPERATED: FROM LATE OCCULTISM TO ESOTERIC CULTS

The period of the ideologies developed by the scholars studied in this dissertation starts in 1910 with René Guénon's initiation to the Shadhili order, guided by Shaykh Elish el Kebir (1845-1922). It ends with the death of the French Orientalist and esotericist, Henry Corbin, in 1978. Corbin's philosophy of religion may well be read as a long-lasting reaction against the influence that Guénon's philosophy had on him in his youth.

The two other scholars are the rector of al-Azhar, 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd (1910-1978), who stamped Guénon's philosophical insights with the label "Islamic Orthodoxy," and finally Guénon's heir in France, Michel Valsan (1911-1974). When Michel Valsan met

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[18] Hermes Trismegistus, in *Dictionary of Gnosis of Western Esotericism*, ed. Woulter Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 479-484.

'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, the latter confirmed Valsan's Islamic Orthodoxy[19]. This was crucial for Valsan and his followers in the sense that it enabled them to become spokesmen of Islam in France. Moreover, it allowed them to present their interpretation of Guénon's teachings as being approved by the main institution of an Eastern tradition, the same one in which Guénon was embedded in the last part of his life.

The historical context, from the point of view of the cultural and spiritual atmospheres that have surrounded these four scholars, can be best described by the transformation of late occultist spiritualities (1930-1950) into religious cults with strong doctrines (1950-1978).

Late occultism starts with the esoteric career of Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875),[20] whose civil name was Alphonse Louis Constant. He was meant to become a Catholic priest, but during his last years at seminary, he fell in love with a catechumen lady. His main work is *Dogme et rituel de la Haute Magie,* published for the first time in 1856. Lévi argues that occultism is a positive science that is as truthful as modern sciences. Nonetheless, he adds immediately that its inner coherence has been veiled by pre-modern authors that were not mature enough to understand its inner rationality. He was convinced that the nineteenth century would see all mysteries revealed and give birth to an era ruled by a mystical feminine figure. Another important book of his is a presentation of what he names Kabbalah but that has in fact only a slight relation to the history of the hidden interpretations of the Jewish canon. Occultist Kabbalah looks for a

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[19] Michel Valsan, "L'Oeuvre de René Guénon en Orient," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 411 (January/February 1969).
[20] Eliphas Lévi, in *Dictionary of Gnosis of Western Esotericism*, ed. Woulter Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 689-692.

universal classification of the whole human knowledge by building a series of equivalencies based on numerological calculations.[21]

Eliphas Lévi's charisma survived in the figure of Papus, whose civil name was Gérard Encausse (1865-1916)[22]. The French magician wrote on such topics as Freemasonry, Magic, Kabbalah, and Christian esotericism. The novelty of Papus is the creation of societies open to a wide public in which people would discuss esotericism. Beside these societies in which esotericism was discussed and taught, Papus was widely known for his treatises on Kabbalah and Martinism, a Christian form of esotericism that dates back to the seventeenth century.

Papus built Martinist lodges in which his interpretation of the Christian secret doctrine was taught, and people would receive "ancient" initiations. When Papus died, more than 160 Martinist lodges were active worldwide from Russia to Latin America. As I explain in the chapter on Guénon, this cultural atmosphere was the main one in which he forged his first conceptual tools as a young adult. In fact, he became the leader of one of these Martinist lodges and had, through a séance, a spiritual experience in which he was in contact with the authorities of the primordial or tradition of the first man, Adam.[23] His later years may well be read as a reaction against the conceptual poverty of Papus' occultism as well as a meditation and philosophical justification of the aforementioned spiritual experience.

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[21] Jewish Influence vs. Occultist Kabbalah in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 675.

[22] Papus, in *Dictionary of Gnosis of Western Esotericism*, ed. Woulter Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 913-915.

[23] Jean-Pierre Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon ou Quelques questions posées par les rapports de sa vie et de son œuvre," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 179, no. 1 (1971): 41-70.

World War II radically stopped the occultist and esoteric effervescence that had begun in the times of Eliphas Lévi. It could well be said that these esoteric circles became divided not according to their spiritual practices but rather according to their political affiliations: fascism for those surrounding the Italian philosopher Julius Evola (1898-1974), a form of spiritual socialism for those involved in the French resistance against the Nazis, such as the young Raymond Abellio (1907-1986) or in a quest for neutrality and strong disdain for historical and political events, as in the case of René Guénon and his followers. After World War II, esoteric salons and Freemason lodges became active again. However, the Cold War between communism and capitalism and the strong ideological doctrines involved were so intense that these esoteric groups quickly moved toward an identification of their practice with steadfast doctrines that were absolute and irrefutable. For instance, after his death, Guénon was uplifted to the status of an "*infallible compass.*"[24]

As I intend to show in the chapter devoted to Guénon's heir in France, Michel Valsan, these are the years in which French-speaking Sufism receives a strong philosophical apparatus for the first time. This movement of progressive dogmatization of Guénon's unsystematic thoughts was something Corbin was well aware of and even criticized.[25] As Xavier Accart reminds us, "According to Corbin, Guénonism leads to 'unilateral dogmatism' in which the true Guénonian would refuse to fall into."[26]

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[24] Michel Valsan, "La Fonction de René Guenon et le sort de l'Occident," *Revue Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 293-294-295 (July–November, 1951): 213-255.

[25] Henry Corbin, Correspondance, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 68e Année, No. 2 (April-June 1963), 234-237.

[26] Xavier Accart, X., Identité et théophanies René Guénon (1886-1951) et Henry Corbin (1903- 1978), in *Politica Hermetica* - René Guénon, lectures et enjeux, vol. 16, 2002, 176-200: "*Selon Corbin, le guénonisme menait à un "dogmatisme unilatéral et mortel" dans lequel refusait de s'enliser "le vrai guénonien".*

Nonetheless, when Corbin desired to transform his philosophy of religion into a spiritual practice that could be transmitted to another person, his thoughts would know the same path as Guénon's views. He opened a para-academic university, l'Université de Saint- Jean de Jerusalem, as well as Martinist Freemason lodges in which he taught his philosophy.[27] He was not a historian of ideas but revered as a spiritual master, as noted by his pupil and philosopher, Christian Jambet: "He was and still is a (spiritual master) because he frees in his readers their future"[28] Another striking example is found in the words of the anthropologist of symbols who taught at the University of Grenoble, Gilbert Durant (1921-2012). In this passage, he narrates his initiation into the Masonic order led by Henry Corbin and his participation in the para-Masonic academy also guided by Corbin, Saint Jean de Jérusalem:

> Je vais résumer brièvement ces [15] ans de ma vie. En [1964], deux ans après notre rencontre, Henry m'introduisit dans le Cercle d'Eranos — où je devais rester fidèle pendant 25 ans et y donner une vingtaine de "conférences" (de 2 heures chacune!). A peu près à la même date [vers 1970-1971], nous étions "adoubés" en l'Église Anglicane de Paris dans l'Ordre Souverain de St Jean de Jérusalem. Puis Henry fondait "l'Université St Jean de Jérusalem" (USJJ) [en 1974] où pendant dix ans, jusqu'en [1987], chaque année en tant qu'unique "Vice-Président" du Maître, je diffusais au cours des stations de l'Université une pensée très proche de celle du Maître. En [1972], tout naturellement, nous étions

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[27] Wouter Hanegraff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 340–342.

[28] Christian Jambet, Forward to Henry Corbin, *Sohravardi d'Alep* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 2001), 16. "*Il était et reste un maître parce qu'il libérait et libère en chacun de ceux qui le lisent son propre futur.*"

"initiés" aux mystères de l'Ordre, dans le vaste temple de la rue de Puteaux

aux côtés d'Henry Corbin.[29]

This historical context gives an understanding of the terrain on which French Modern Perennnialism has interpreted the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī. Although a variety of scholars have studied the history of European Perennialism, only a few of them have attempted to describe the set of rules modern Perennialists abide to while interpreting pre-modern philosophies of religion, such as, for instance, Ibn 'Arabī's teachings.

0.5 STATE OF THE ART: FROM CHRISTIAN PERENNIALISM TO MODERN FRENCH-SPEAKING SUFI PERENNIALISM

One of the first major books attempting to outline a critical history of Perennialism is the one written by Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: A Historical Outline of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought,*[30] which was published in 1998 in German and in 2004 in English. Here, the author traces the expression "perennial philosophy" to a librarian of the Vatican Agostino Steucho (1497-1548), who first published a book with the title *De Perenni Philosophia* in 1540. Agostino Steucho draws on the expression "philosophia Prisca" to designate a natural theology common to all mankind, from Adam to the era of the Renaissance, that fully blossoms in the Catholic theology. This common knowledge of mankind is here identified as divine inspiration given to philosophers such as Plato or Hermes Trismegistus. Schmidt-Biggeman identifies the "core" of perennial philosophy with

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[29] Manuel Quinon, Préhistoire et histoire des Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme (1950–1970). Les parcours croisés de Claire Lejeune et Gilbert Durant, *Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme*, no. 119, 120-131.

[30] Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: A Historical Outline of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2004).

"divine names, the divine logos, the primordial ideal world, the realization of the world in space, the concepts of time and world history, and finally the idea of the tradition of Adamite wisdom through the centuries." Indeed, perennial philosophy, as Schmidt-Biggemann explains later in his book, teaches that divine names designate the essence of beings. The combination of divine names and the order given to these by the logos unites creation with God's mind. It is the purpose of philosophers to regain the capacity to speak Adam's language. Adam's language is here understood as the relationship between the spoken word and the essence of a thing, or its archetype. When the philosopher mystically finds this language, he is in possession of the knowledge of God's mind.

Schmidt-Biggemann's book focuses mostly on Renaissance philosophers, whereas in the following pages, we will address the thoughts of twentieth-century European Sufi Perennialist scholars. Nonetheless, it is a groundbreaking book in the sense that it has shown the importance of a current of Western thought that is often considered irrelevant; in the context of my research, Schmidt-Biggeman's work has its limits. In fact, if Perennialist philosophy has for centuries been fundamentally a Christian theology, many of its spokesmen in the twentieth century converted to Islam.

Another relevant book, Mark Sedgwick's *Against the Modern World,*[31] was the first to show that the kind of perennial philosophy taught to scholars of Sufism is a historical construct that goes back to *fin de siècle* occultist circles. Mark Sedgwick distinguishes Traditionalism from Perennialism, explaining that Perennialism is included in Traditionalism, but the reverse does not apply. The difference lies in the fact that the

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[31] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

traditionalists Sedgwick speaks of (many of whom are protagonists of the present dissertation) believe that in embracing modernity, the West has severed its relation from the spiritual centers that are still attached to universal esoteric knowledge. Therefore, these Perennialist scholars believe that the West can only be regenerated by people who have gained direct access to this perennial Eastern wisdom. Most of these scholars have chosen Islam and Sufism as the path to the universal esoteric core they are aiming to reach. This, then, is the main difference between pre-modern Perennialism and modern Perennialism. Pre-modern Perennialism teaches that the Christian tradition is the most universal one, while most modern Perennialist scholars practice non-European religions or spiritual traditions. Mark Sedgwick's book has shifted the focus of the current academic studies of Sufism in the sense that he has shown that these are not neutral studies but rather politically oriented and tied to a specific historical context.

In 2017 and 2018, two books were published on the arguments of Western Sufism and Modern Sufi Perennialism: Mark Sedgwick's *Western Sufism* and Gregory Lipton's *Rethinking IbnʿArabī*. The differences between these books set up the framework of the present dissertation. In fact, both books offer different answers to the question: *In what ways does a Perennialist author appropriate and reframe the different pre-modern meanings attributed to the word "Sufism"?* Both authors recognize that the specificity of Western Sufism is that it is a negotiation between a belief in the existence of an esoteric and metaphysical core and the persuasion that anything that is exoteric and formal is less true than the above mentioned esoteric core. Sufism is then identified with the esoteric and universal core, while Islam is identified with the exoteric religion that must be superseded by the initiate.

The difference between writings by Sedgwick and Lipton is in the following. For the former, the relation between Western Sufism and the form of Sufism practiced by al Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabī, is accepted under a Neoplatonist umbrella, foremost Plotinian, that he sees informing both Eastern Sufism and modern Western Sufism alike. This Neoplatonist umbrella is identifiable through three discursive markers:

-The relation between the ultimate One and the many is that of an ontological emanation: "Everything must derive from the One without implicating the One in any form of change."[32]

-The individual soul found in matter and the universal soul found in intelligence are one: "By parallel, a landscape which a number of people are admiring remains one, even though each person has their own separate and different view of that landscape."[33]

-Neoplatonism implies a chain of being in which being is homogeneous to consciousness. This is to say that the consciousness—or as Sedgwick calls it, the "life force"[34]—of being is being itself and nothing else.

In the same book, Sedgwick includes a presentation of Guénon's teachings in a chapter titled "The Establishment of Sufism in the West, 1910-1933." If before Guénon, Sufism was an intellectual curiosity, with Inayat Khan and Guénon, it became a way of life, with Sufi institutions or prayer houses established all over Europe.

Sedgwick's consideration supports the title of this dissertation. In fact, I intend to study Guénon's philosophical construction and the one built by his legacy in the period in

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[32] Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20.
[33] Sedgwick, 20.
[34] Sedgwick, 21.

which Sufism is not an intellectual exotic figure but a set of texts that need to be translated, closely studied, and put into practice, i.e., embodied by a European Sufi group that adheres to a shared philosophical dogma. Nonetheless, there are two main limits of Sedgwick's book. The first is that the category "West" is never dismantled, and thus its effects on the writing process seem sometimes to escape the author's intention; for instance, in the following quotation: "Although the West and Islam have often developed separately from each other, they have not developed in isolation from each other."[35] This opposition between the name of a religion and the name of a geographical area structures the thoughts of the historian and thus seem to reinforce the belief that something like the "West" and "Islam" exist and are in a perpetual cosmological conflict, or at least conversation.

The second limit of this book is that it does not sufficiently problematize the gap between the trajectories of interpretation of Sufism made by pre-modern followers of Ibn 'Arabī, such as Qūnawī for instance, and the modern Western Sufi reception of Ibn 'Arabī, such as the one undertaken by Valsan. This conflict of interpretations is almost untouched by the author, who instead of treating a proper name of a Sufi (such as Ibn 'Arabī) as a polemic signifier treats it rather as having a doctrine of its own.

An approach that considers a proper name as a polemic signifier lies in the heart of the book by Lipton, who sets two goals in his book. The first aim is to show that between classical Islamic worldviews (such as those expressed by al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabī) and the modern worldviews expressed by European Sufi Perennialists, such as René Guénon and his Swiss successor Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), exists a competition

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[35] Sedgwick, 250.

regarding what is universal and what is not. For classical Islamic worldviews (e.g., al Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabī), the Law of Muhammad that has abrogated the salvific validity of other religions as well as their mystical pedagogies is universal. For European Sufi Perennialists, the first principle that encompasses in its reality all beliefs, spiritual traditions and religions is universal. Lipton writes, "Schuon made a Copernican turn toward a cosmic pluralism away from such a totalizing cosmology centered around the Prophet."[36]

The second aim of the book is to uncover the rhetorical procedures by which Frithjof Schuon, a Swiss disciple of René Guénon who established a community in Bloomington, Indiana (U.S.A.), cut the name of Ibn 'Arabī in two: one aspect that is compatible with Schuon and Guénon's concept of the esoteric core of all traditions and one that is seen as incompatible with Schuon's philosophy of religion. This divide is ultimately a *völkisch* one and thus forges an opposition between an "Aryan" way of knowing God and a "Semitic" and less perfect way of obeying God. Lipton writes, "Schuon's obvious disdain for an 'Arabo-Semitic' heteronomy has been smuggled back into contemporary Perennialist reading of Ibn 'Arabī, yet only dissociated from Ibn 'Arabī's discourse himself."[37]

However, the differences between Sedgwick and Lipton are not merely formal. The fundamental difference between these two authors lies in their relation to Edward Said's work and, more broadly, to the studies that have deconstructed Orientalism since then. Said was among the first to indicate the existence of an imaginary construction of

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[36] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 118.
[37] Lipton, 119.

the "East" by Europe to prepare the military conquest of the Middle East.[38] If Lipton takes

the layers of critical studies of Orientalism that have been written in relation to Sufism as

a foundation for his work, Sedgwick deliberately avoids tackling the problem raised by

Said's *Orientalism.*

In an interview about his last book, *Western Sufism*, Sedgwick declares, "But I

suppose Edward Said was always there in the background as a sort of counter-inspiration.

I don't take him on explicitly in the book, but in one sense the whole book is showing that

while Said was right in important ways, there's also another story, or many other stories,

that point in quite different directions, and also need to be told."[39]

In fact, Sedgwick sees the relation between Western Sufism and Arab-speaking

Sufism as not conflictual for the simple reason that, according to him, on both sides of the

Mediterranean Sea, they speak a Neoplatonist grammar. On the other hand, Lipton sees in

Schuon's interpretation of Sufism and in Ibn 'Arabī s exclusivist religious worldview a

web of conflicts that must emerge in the cautious analysis of their writings. He does not

rely directly on Edward Said but on other scholars inspired by Said's studies, such as

Richard King[40] or Tomoko Masuzawa.[41] Both scholars have shown how the construction

of the Orient by nineteenth-century Orientalists served the purpose of building a Western

concept of religion that would later be applied to the beliefs of the world's population and

often incorporated by these same colonized people.

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[38] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[39] Mark Sedgwick, "Western Sufism: 7 Questions for Mark Sedgwick," *sacredmattersmagazine.com*, published April 21st, 2017, retrieved on October 11th, 2018.
[40] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion, Postcolonial Theory, India and the "Mystic East"* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
[41] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

All French-speaking Sufi Perennialists studied in this dissertation follow a pattern close to what has been described as "Orientalism in reverse."[42] This expression designates those ideologies that see in the "East" everything that is perfect and in the "West" all that is decadent. They tend to follow an internalization of the image of the "East" constructed by the colonizing powers, but instead of adhering to it, they simply capsize it.

I am interested in the in-between spaces between the form of French Sufism constructed by René Guénon and his legacy on one hand and Qūnawī's pre-modern Sufism on the other. This dissertation does not focus on the ideal images of their self- perceptions; my aim is to sketch the shapes and shades of these in-between spaces in which Ibn 'Arabī's name is dragged into a modern French theopolitical framework.

One last book needs to be mentioned regarding the appropriation of Ibn 'Arabī by Western philosophies of religion. Suha Taji Farouki[43] published her book, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabī: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World*, in 2010. Beshara refers to the movement founded by the Turkish spiritual leader Bulent Rauf (d.1987). Farouki's main point is that Beshara has essentialized the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī to the extent that the Andalusian mystic's teachings are severed from any religious perspective. She has also closely studied the connections between some Perennialist authors and the Beshara movement and noted the main differences between these two appropriations of Ibn 'Arabī. The Perennialists attempt to present Ibn 'Arabī as an "Orthodox"[44] Sufi while

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[42] Monica Corrado, *Mit Tradition in die Zukunft: Der taǧdīd-Diskurs in der Azhar und ihrem Umfeld* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011), 206.

[43] Suha Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabī: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2007), 194-206.

[44] For a problematization of this category as it has been used in the study of religion, see: Brett

Beshara has no interest in religiously grounding Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. With regard to the present dissertation, Farouki's book focuses on the similarities between the New Age movement and Beshara and thus does not tackle the question of the historical and conceptual construction of a coherent European philosophy that seeks to include Ibn 'Arabī 's name inside its authoritative framework.

A final statement on the expression "French-speaking Sufi Perennialist" is needed. Guénon and his followers belong to the wider history of Perennialism and thus are fully committed to perpetuating the philosophical dynamics that they find in the works of Steucho, Cusano and later Christian Kabbalists. By labeling them neo-Sufis, I dismiss their perception of themselves as carriers of an eternal and esoteric message delivered only by Islam. Moreover, this dissertation being related to the inclusion of Ibn 'Arabī's name in French Sufi theopolitical views, it is important to bear in mind that French language plays an important role in the construction of Modern Sufi Perennialism. These are the reasons why I use the term "French Sufi Perennialists" rather than "neo- Sufis."

1. OVERVIEW OF QŪNAWĪ'S THEOPOLITICS

1.1 WHO WAS QŪNAWĪ?

In order to show what the features of a French Modern Perennialist interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī are, I first need to introduce the reader to the earliest historical and thus pre-modern systematization of Ibn 'Arabī's main theopolitical insights.

Wilson, "The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of 'Orthodoxy' in the Study of Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007): 169-94.

Sadr Din Qūnawī was the stepchild and immediate heir of Shaykh Ibn 'Arabī, who was often named by Sufi scholars as the "greatest shaykh" of all time. Ibn 'Arabī has written more than eight hundred texts of various lengths. Two of these are the most important: *Futuhat al-Makkya* and *Fusus al-Hikam*. *Futuhat al-Makkya* or *Meccan Revelations* presents a compendium of the various ways in which the Islamic sciences (Islamic law, sayings of the Prophet, commentary of the Qur'an, states of the heart, and the intellect on its path toward God, i.e., Sufism) are intertwined in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. *Fusus al-Hikam* or *Bezels of Wisdom* is a treatise that Ibn 'Arabī believed to have received from the Prophet himself. In this text, he associates a specific kind of wisdom to each of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. In 1232, Qūnawī was given authorization to transmit and teach Ibn 'Arabī's writings in their entirety.

Qūnawī was born in 1209 in Konya[45], which was a major city in the sultanate of Rum and a haven for Sufis. Both Ibn 'Arabī and the family of the great Sufi Jalaludin Rumi (1207-1273) found protection and financial security in the leaders of the Seljuk Empire. The Mongols were threatening the Seljuk Empire from the East, and famine was also at the time a constant peril. Qūnawī grew up in Damascus in the household of Ibn 'Arabī. After the death of his master, he became one of the two leaders of Ibn 'Arabī's pupils and disciples, the other one being Ibn Sawdakin (d.1248). Following his pilgrimage to Mecca and a few years in Cairo, Qūnawī traveled back to Konya, where he eventually became Shaykh al-Islam (i.e., the highest authority in Islamic sciences of the Seljuk Empire). He was also granted a large prayer house in which he taught his systematization of Ibn 'Arabī's writings. In Konya, he befriended the well-known poet and mystic Rumi,

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[45] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 6-7.

although both led different lifestyles.[46] Rumi was a jurist and a poet who understood Sufism as a practice that stressed economical poverty and a certain distance from all political institutions, although this was not Qūnawī's opinion on the matter. Nonetheless, Rumi asked that his funeral prayer should be led by Qūnawī himself.

On Qūnawī's bequest, his library became, after his death, public dominion except for his books of philosophy. These were all sold, and the money was given to charity.[47]

I rely mainly on two books written by Qūnawī. The first is a commentary of the first Surah of the Qur'an: *I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl Umm al-Kitāb*. Through the commentary of the Fatiha, Qūnawī unfolds his teachings on the process by which a metaphysical pre-created meaning becomes perceptible in the world and readable in the scriptures. The second book is named *Kitāb al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhīyah* (*The Divine Breaths*). This treatise combines a presentation of his mystical experiences with a meditation on their meanings. It is in this book that we find a description of his most profound mystical experience. In the following passage, Qūnawī narrates a vision he had of his stepfather after his death:

> On the night of the 17th Shawwāl, in the year six hundred and fifty-three (20th November 1255), I saw the Shaykh – may God be pleased with him – in a long vision [*wāqiʿa*]. There was much talk between us, in the course of which I said to him: "the effects of the names derive from the conditions and modalities, the conditions and modalities derive from the states [of being], the states [of being]

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[46] Masataka Takeshita, "Sadr al-Din Qūnawī from a Mevlevi Point of View," last modified on August 13, 2008, http://akademik.semazen.net/article_detail.php?id=383.

[47] William Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament of Sadr Din Qūnawī," *Sophia Perennis* 4, no. 1 (1978): 43-58.

are determined by the essence in accordance with the predisposition, and the predisposition is something not caused by anything other than itself." The Shaykh was so pleased with this that his face shone with joy, and, nodding his head, he repeated some of the things I had said, and added: "Splendid! Splendid!" "The splendour is all yours, master!" I responded, "for being able to nurture someone and raise them to the point where they grasp such things. By my life, if you are just a man then the rest of us are nothing!' Then, approaching him, I kissed his hand and said: "I still have one further thing to ask of you." "Ask!" he said. "I wish to realise the way in which you perpetually and eternally behold the self-disclosure of the [divine] Essence," by which I meant the attainment of all that he attained by beholding the essential theophany, whereafter there can be no veiling, and before which there can be no settled abode for the perfect [*al-kummal*]. "So be it." said [the shaykh], and he accorded me what I had asked for.[48]

Another book must be mentioned. It is the epistolary between Qūnawī and the philosopher Nasr Din Tusi, in which the Sufi tries to convince the philosopher of the limits of rational thinking and the need to follow a mystical path that moves the Sufi to the absolute presence of God.[49] Finally, I have also benefited from two recent books on Qūnawī. The first is written by Anthony Shaker,[50] who enters into the philosophy of language of the Anatolian Sufi to grasp the connections Qūnawī makes between speech,

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[48] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 21. Translation by Richard Todd.

[49] Kitāb al-Mufawadat, "Briefwechsel Zwischen Ṣadr ud-Dīn Qūnawī (gest. 673/1274) und Naṣīr ud-dīn Ṭūsī (gest. 672/1274)" Edited and commmented by Gudrun Schubert (PhD diss., Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995).

[50] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 352.

divine presence, and the reality that is felt though our peceptions. This book approximates the school of Ibn 'Arabī with Heidegger's philosophy. The second book is written by Richard Todd[51], who presents a general overview of Qūnawī's teachings on man (his metaphysical origin, his human state, and his liberation from this world) and insists on the Hermetic legacy that infuses his worldview: "In addition to Neoplatonism, Ṣadr al-Dīn – like many Muslim authors of his day – draws on another important 'inheritance' from the ancient world: Hermeticism." [52]

1.2 Qūnawī on God's Unity and Rules

Qūnawī's treatment of *Tawhid,* or declaring God's oneness, can be best analyzed in the following excerpt, which is found in the first pages of his treatise, The Divine Breaths. This mystical opening tackles the question of the relation between divine unity and the plurality of things that are created.

The first degree of existents is the fact that they [belong to] hiddenness, remote in respect of meaning from the difference of the root according to the wisdom/rule [*ḥukm*] and proof comprised by His words, "God was and no thing was with Him." To this station belongs the first division of the Fātiḥah. When the things are eternal by "essence" not by "other", the rule of that by which there is unification [*al-ittiḥād*] is stronger and more dominant than the rule of that by which there is distinction [*al-imtiāz*]. Hence, when the rule of that by which there is distinction becomes stronger and more dominant for the lordly journey [*al-sayr al-rabbānī*] from hiddenness to witness at the creational level [*al-martabah al-*

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[51] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3.

[52] Todd, 62.

kawniyyah] and the contingent receptacles [*al-qawābil al-imkāniyiya*], the delimitations and their rules and the immutable essences [*al-aʿyān al- thābitah*]and their effects manifest themselves in that through which they make their appearance, namely, God. The procession [*faʾl-sulūk*] signifies [many] things. Among them is the removal of what is presented to the eye when [these things] are distinguished from the hiddenness of God and *wellspring of the divine unity* [*al-tawaḥḥud al-ilāhī*], in which the dominance belongs to the rule of that by which there is unification, despite the accompaniment of the special property of whatever comes upon and permeates it—plane after plane, stage after stage.[53]

This paragraph must be deciphered by diving it into the notions of his stepfather and Qūnawī's own investigations. Moreover, this passage relies on two notions developed by Ibn ʿArabī and that have been further investigated by his stepson.

The first notion teaches us that each thing has a face oriented toward God's oneness. This face belongs to all that is necessary to the creation and is identical to the "immutable essence," which is to say the thing as it is known from eternity in God's science. It is unconditional, as it carries with itself the most intense trace of the absolute negation by which God's essence differentiates itself from its own self-disclosures (i.e., God's manifestations in and through all that is not Him). This same thing has then a second face that is oriented toward the creation and the contingent manifestations that are witnessed in it. This is best exemplified in the following quotation translated by Richard

Todd:

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[53] Sadr-Din Qūnawī, *Nafahat al-Ilahiya* [*The Divine Breaths*] (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 2007), 21-2. Emphasis is mine. I thank Anthony Shaker for having kindly revised this translation of mine.

There is not a single being that is not connected to the True through two faces [*wajhayn*]: one from the side of the chain of succession and intermediaries [*silsilat al-tartīb wa-l-wasāʾiṭ*], the first of which is the First Intellect; and the other from the side of its necessity [wujūb], which adjoins the True, and in which respect it may truly be said of every being that it is necessary, even though its necessity is through another.[54]

These two faces of the same thing are related in the sense that God's oneness reveals His self-identity through multiple self-disclosures [*tajaliyāt*] that are exemplified in at least three degrees which can be orally communicated: its unity as it can be intellectually grasped, but which is not identical with its utmost unicity; its self-disclosure in the presence of the immutable essence; and its self-disclosure in what comes through each immutable essence in a given time and space in this visible world, such as one's birth in the world or one's own body.[55]

What thus remains unclear in Ibn ʿArabī's teachings is the nature of the connection between these two faces: the one that belongs to the necessary causes and the one that belongs to the contingent manifestations. Qūnawī expresses this connection in his philosophy, as shown in the paragraph above, by the concept of *ḥukm* that can be translated by wisdom/rule/judgment. The *ḥukm* has the power to rule over each immutable essence by defining its limited character and uniting all manifestations that belong in the transient world to this same immutable essence. Why does this *ḥukm* have the power to rule over the immutable essence and to unite the manifestations of all that belong to this

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[54] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man*, 57.

[55] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 89-94.

immutable essence in the transient world? This is because it is an expression of the Truthful, a divine name of God.

Here, Qūnawī's philosophy grounds itself in the conviction that the unconditional face and the contingent face are connected through the formula "truthful of the Truthful" (*ḥaqq al-ḥaqq*), where the first term refers to the worshipping servant (*'abd*) and the second to the lord (rabb); the first term refers to the contingent manifestations, the second to the necessary character of the immutable essence, as it bears the seal of God's sovereignty. Anthony Shaker presents Qūnawī's inheritance of Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the formula "truthful of the Truthful" (*ḥaqq al-ḥaqq*) with the following words:

> The receptivity of God's servant was not only conditional upon this commonality, but also constituted a precept of one of God's own attributes. The reason was that the relation of commonality signified the acceptance [*qubūl*] of each judgment at some state, level, time period, abode, and locus of appearance according to the rule of the one making the judgment (i.e., the judge). In the province of the isthmus, the creational individualities for "things common" ultimately were classed with ḥaqq al-Ḥaqq (the right or entitlement of God). Ibn ʿArabī had attached ḥaqq (right) to that attribution which safeguarded "rightfulness" [*istiḥqāq*] according to an essential attribute. In this sense, the "right of God" reflected His lordship [*rubūbīyatuhu*]; whereas the "right of creation," or *ḥaqq al-khalq*, signaled creation's servanthood [*'ubūdīyatuhu*]. "We are servants even if we appear through God's own traits;

He is our Lord though He may appear through our traits," Ibn 'Arabī had declared.[56]

It is then through this connection of "truthful of the Truthful," which expresses the power of a principal wisdom/rule/judgment, that the individual can unite all that is manifested through him in this transient world with his immutable essence. Furthermore, it is because he has united his contingent manifestations with his immutable essence that he directly experiences the sovereignty of the divine rule/judgment/wisdom over his immutable essence and thus knows God's oneness.

However, what does it mean for him to unite all that is manifested through him with his immutable essence? According to Qūnawī, this means that he has reached the middle station between the hidden world (which is his immutable essence) and the visible world (in which he acknowledges all that is manifested through his immutable essence). Qūnawī writes, while commenting the Qur'anic verse, "He is the First *and* the Last *and* the Manifest *and* the Hidden" (Qur'an 57:3):

This refers to the station of His Ipseity [*ḥuwiya*] in the *middle* [al *wāsiṭ*] between the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden. This connection notifies us about our path of *proclaiming God's absolute oneness* that reaches the Kaaba (the black cube in Mecca) after having been on the path of proclaiming God's oneness that was oriented to Jerusalem. This secret is made present in the verse "Say: To Allah belongs the East and the West, He guides whom He wills on the rightful path" (Sura 2 v. 142); between the East and the

[56] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* ((Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 261.

West means that we belong to the community of the middle "And we have put you

as the community of the middle" (Sura 2 v. 143).[57]

Now it is possible to understand the quotation with which I have opened this subchapter on Qūnawī's understanding of *Tawhid*, or God's oneness. Each thing has two faces: One is oriented toward the contingent world of all that is manifested, and one is oriented toward the absolute oneness that is unconditioned by anything. Each thing that experiences the divine rule/wisdom that exerts its lordly power upon its immutable essence is able through this same rule/wisdom to unify all the images (i.e. God's self-disclosures or *tajaliyāt*) that his essence manifests in the transient world.

However, to be fully aware of the relation between, on one side of its existence, *God's absolute oneness and his immutable essence* and, on the other side of its existence, *all that his immutable essence manifests*, he needs to join the middle point between opposites.

What Qūnawī displays is then a world of dominations (*ḥukm*: wisdom/rules) and connections (between opposites, between the "truth" "of the servant and the "Truth" of God, between the absolute oneness and the immutable essence, between God and the world), where the basic underlying question may well be stated in the following manner: Who rules over the connections that relate the hidden and manifested things together?

Qūnawī accordingly looks for an influence that expresses a power relation between the one who exerts the power and the one who is empowered by the source of this same

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[57] Ṣadr al-Dīn al- Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: Dar al Kotob al Ilmiyah, 2005), 233, translation and emphasis are mine. The mention of Jerusalem refers to the moment in which Muhammad's community changed the orientation of their prayers from Jerusalem to Mecca.

power. Subsequently, he cuts this relation in two, finding the middle point between the extremes. How does he then organize his thoughts around the concept of God's oneness? Qūnawī looks at God's oneness as the power that emits the rule/wisdom which connects God's absoluteness or ipseity with the unity that keeps the opposites at the same distance from their center.

1.3 Qūnawī on the Perfect Human Being

Qūnawī structures the world according to power relations between the one who emits a rule and the one who is empowered by this rule and thus puts it into action. He the approaches these power relations in two ways: First, Qūnawī identifies the two different elements that are connected by the rule, and, second, he sets a middle point in the center of this connection.

He understands the middle points as the center that does not incline toward any of the two elements of the connection.

Qūnawī declares that the:

companion of the middle is in an equilibrium and a person that has rightfully realized the Truth" because he has realized the secret of bringing together the essence of appearances and the absolute oneness that are to be found in the East [i.e., the place of the all that is hidden] and the West [i.e., the place of all that is manifested]. The Perfect Human Being is then not oriented exclusively to one side but is in the middle where there is "no where, no from, no towards".[58]

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[58] Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-Bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 233. Translation and emphasis are mine.

In this sense, the Perfect Human Being becomes the universal middle between opposites. This is then the universality of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Qūnawī defines this universality as follows:

> The one whose station is the point in the middle of the circle, such that he remains unaffected by the pull [*jadhabāt*] of the surrounding extremes, like our Prophet Muḥammad – may God's peace and grace be upon him – his words will be the most universal in scope and authority, and the revelations that descend upon him will be the most comprehensive, and comprise the greatest store of knowledge, owing to his embracing all the characteristics of these degrees, such that absolutely nothing is out- side the dominion of his metaphysical station, and nothing is beyond his grasp.[59]

This teaching by Qūnawī refers to Ibn 'Arabī's general goal (i.e., the attainment of the "station of no station"). In Ian Almond's words:

> What becomes clear, however, from any genuine reading of Ibn 'Arabī, is that his system is no logocentric description of essences and hierarchies inscribed in stone, but rather a series of ladders which ultimately lead one to a "station of no station". Ibn 'Arabī's system, far from being an example of metaphysics, actually leads us past it, to a place where (in Abu Yazid's words) there is no morning or evening, no attributes or names.[60]

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[59] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man*, 100.

[60] Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn 'Arabī* (London: Routledge, 2004), 130. The station of no station refers to Qur'an (33:13).

Qūnawī's Perfect Human Being is located in the empty center between the two extremities of the rule. From there, he dominates the relations that shape the whole movements of existence.

Moreover, by dint of the universality implicit in his role as the middle presence, the Perfect Human Being is deemed capable of becoming conscious of all degrees of existence and of *commanding* all their possibilities:

> He who is the manifest form of the heart of synthesis and Being [*qalb al-jamʿi wa-l-wujūd*], even as our Prophet is – peace be upon him – his station is the central point of the circle of existence. With the five faces of his heart he is turned toward every world, Presence and degree, and with his all-encompassing face he commands the conditions and modalities of all these worlds and appears with all their qualities.[61]

1.4 QŪNAWĪ'S ABROGATIVE CHARACTER OF ISLAM

The following subchapter deals with Qunawi's use of the classical view on the relation between Islam and other religions, which sees them as being abrogated and untrue to God's message. This view is classical in the sense that the formula "abrogate and made vain" when referred to non-Islamic religions is a *refrain* that - located in its medieval socio-political context which sees a theopolitical conflict between Christians and Muslims over what the nature of God is beyond the first intellect, and, subsequently, over what should be the religion of the political elite - is common to all the main Islamic thinkers of this period (e.g. al Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabī)[62].

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[61] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man*, 101. Emphasis is mine

[62] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn ʿArabī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 64-75.

I intend then to show in this subchapter in which part of Qunawi's reasoning the classical formula "all previous religions have been abrograted and made vain" appears and how it distinguishes three groups of people: one that belongs to pre-muhammadian communities, one that follows the law of Muhammad without trying to understand its metaphysical dimension, and finally one that follows the law of Muhammad and understands its metaphysical dimension.

Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī expresses the idea that there exist three paths that lead to God. In these paragraphs are also found the passage where Qūnawī mentions the classical formula by which Muslim scholars express the abrogation of all pre-Islamic religious paths by Islam.

The first path accesses a knowledge of one's generic oneness "not through what is stable in one's identity but rather through the consideration of one's essence itself."[63] This first path, Qūnawī notes, refers to the guidance and knowledge of God given to the pre-muhammadian prophets. Qūnawī links this first path to the Qur'anic verse (6:90) : "It is (these) people (the Messengers of Allah) whom Allah has granted guided. So (O Last of the Prophets) put into practice all their (exalted and superior) ways and methods"[64]. He comments on this verse with the following words:

So remember that following all of the prophets or each one of them is the

starting point from which one travels to God's knowledge. (But), once the

knowledge of God (God's unity) is given to them (by pre-muhammadian

prophets), the prophet (Muhammad) guides them on the right path [*siraṭ al*

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[63] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: Dar al Kotob al Ilmiyah, 2005), 218.
[64] Trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri

mustaqim]. He (Muhammad) is the one that informs them (the messengers)

that they are truthful in their calling the people to the love of their lords.

Therefore, they follow him (Muhammad) and thus Allah loves them.[65]

The second is the path that leads to the knowledge of God by considering "the

stability of the metaphysical reality of the One under which are to be found the

singular unities." The third path leads to the knowledge of the metaphysical reality

by "drowning in it," and thus it brings forth the awareness of "the stability of the

reality under which are to be found the singular unities."[66] Qūnawī ends this

explanation of the three paths by saying, "The first path is the path of the essence,

the second is the path of the pact while the third belongs to those who have

drowned into the reality (of those who have strenghtened the pact with God)."[67]

Qūnawī identifies the knowledge of the wisdom that connects the divine essence and the

people of the third path with the knowledge of the alliance made by God and Muhammad.

Against those who affirm that the Islamic faith per se cannot be divided in degrees[68], Qūnawī

posits this identification (e.g., the knowledge of the relation between the divine essence and

the Qur'anic wisdom that connects God and Muhammad) with the following argument:

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[65] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 218.   Translation and Emphasis are mine.

[66] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb*, 218.

[67] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb*, 218.

[68] Most probably, Qūnawī refers here to Abu Tali al Makki (d.996) who identified in his Nourishment of the   Hearts (Qut al Qulub), chap. 35 integrally faith (Iman) with Islam while for instance Al Ghazali distinguishes   Islam from Faith (Iman) and contemplative virtue (Ihsan). See Kojiro Nakamura, "Makki and Ghazali on Mystical Practices," *Orient* XX (1984), 83-91.

Know that guidance and piety and all that is like these two activities can be ordered according to these three degrees: the first, the middle and the end. The following point is verified by the unveiling of the people that have grasped the meaning of being (ahl al-kashf wa-l-wujud). He (God) informs us then in his majestic book that

- There is no sin on those who believe and do righteous deeds with regard to what they have eaten (of the unlawful things before the prohibition came), whereas (in all   other   matters)   they   were Godwary and put firm faith (in other commandments of   Allah), and practised pious deeds consistently. Later (also after the revelation of the prohibitions), they desisted from (all the unlawful things)   and believed (true-   heartedly in their unlawfulness), became men of piety and Godwariness, and (finally) rose to the station of men of spiritual excellence (i.e., Allah's beloved, favourite, intimate and righteous servants). And Allah loves those who live with spiritual excellence.[69]

- And I am surely Most Forgiving to him who repents and affirms faith and behaves piously, then sticks to guidance (firmly).[70]

These verses of the Qur'an inform that those who have a sound spiritual insight perceive, after the faith in God the confirmation of the

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[69] The Qur'an 5:9, trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri.

[70] The Qur'an 20:82, trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri.

unity of the degrees   in the soul. These degrees are faith,

guidance, and piety. All of these degrees then   hint toward something

that is added to them (the act that confirms the reality of   these

realities), as it is stated in the following verse: "He is the One Who

sent down   calmness and tranquility into he   hearts   of   the

believers so that *their faith   gets increased with more faith* (and

the faith learnt—'the knowledge of   certitude'   changes   into

the faith seen—'the eye of   certitude'). And all the armies of the

heavens and the earth belong to Allah alone. And Allah is All-

Knowing, Most Wise."[71] Also, "We (now) narrate to you their actual

state of affairs. They were indeed (a few) *young men who believed in*

their Lord, and We increased for them (the light of) guidance.[72] . . .

He is the One Who has revealed to you the Book comprising some

firm and solid Verses (i.e., literally clear and precise in meaning); they

are the foundation of (the commandments) of the Book. And other

Verses are figurative (i.e., containing abstract and allusive meaning).

So, those who have deviation in their hearts follow only its figurative

Verses (just) under the   urge to create disruption   and   with   the

motive to supply them self-seeking   interpretation instead of their

true interpretation. But none knows its true interpretation apart from

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[71] The Qur'an 48:4, trans. Muhammad Asad. Qūnawī quotes from the verse only the words that I have highlighted.

[72] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī Tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 218-19. Emphasis is mine. The Qur'an 18:1, trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri. Qūnawī quotes from the verse only   the words that I have highlighted.

Allah. *And those who are perfectly firm in knowledge say: 'We believe in it. The whole (Book) has been revealed by our Lord.'* . . . In verse (5:9)[73] we need to emphasise the presence of the word 'later' (thumma) that allows us to draw a distinction between what came before and what comes after. Should we not then acknowledge the distinction between the (singularizing, added) guidance that is given to whom has already returned to God and that comes after the bare faith in Him along with the sincere actions that are associated with the bare faith in Him and the (general) guidance given to who has been guided to truthful path [*dīn*] after the coming of Muhammad, *and the knowledge that this truthful path is the Islamic path and that what is not Islam, is abrogated (mansu*h*) and made vain/false (ba*ṭ*il)?*[74]

The classical formula of "abrogation and made vain" therefore appears in Qūnawī's writings in the distinction he draws between those who tread the third path and who have converted to the general guidance of Islam - and thus to its abrogative character - and the traveler towards the knowledge of God's intention in creating the cosmos who has received a singularizing guidance that is added

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[73] There is no sin on those who believe and do righteous deeds with regard to what they have eaten (of the unlawful things before the prohibition came), whereas (in all other matters) they were Godwary and put firm faith (in other commandments of Allah), and practised pious deeds consistently. Later (also after the revelation of the prohibitions), they desisted from (all the unlawful things) and believed (true-heartedly in their unlawfulness), became men of piety and Godwariness, and (finally) rose to the station of men of spiritual excellence (i.e., Allah's beloved, favourite, intimate and righteous servants). And Allah loves those who live with spiritual excellence.
Trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri.

[74] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 219. Translation and Emphasis are mine.

to the first general guidance. The latter has received a specific grace. This specific grace is an essential one that comes from God's mercy and that is cognized by the one who has extinguished his manifested existence in his own immutable essence. This specific grace adds something to the previous guidance in the sense that it makes God's guidance known. In other words, the added guidance given to those who tread the second path - which is the path of the middle in which the mystic experiences the reality of the pact between God and Muhammad - enables them to see in whole clarity the wisdom/rule given to Muhammad. Ibn 'Arabī had already explained that the creation of the Muhammadian reality acts as a redoublement of Allah's existence, calling this redoublement the the added thing (*zayd'amr*).[75] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī shows how this added thing is an added guidance according to the Qur'an and quotes the different verses of the Qur'an where the divine interlocutor speaks of an added piety and an added faith.[76]

However, both the Muslim that follows the general muhammadian guidance and belongs to the third path and the Muslim who meditates on the metaphysical dimension of the law given to Muhammad share the fundamental idea that Islam has abrogated the previous religions and that the previous messengers follow Muhammad's law as it is: "and after the mere knowledge of God's unity (given by the pre-muhammadian prophets), the prophet (Muhammad) guides (the pre-muhammadian messengers of Allah) toward the

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[75] Denis Gril, "Le Terme du Voyage," in *Les Illuminations de la Mecque* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988), 142.

[76] Qūnawī quotes, for instance, the Qur'an 48:3 and the Qur'an 18:13.

rightful path."[77] We now need to understand in what ways the revealed law - in

Qūnawī's view - adds a more perfect knowledge of God to the bare faith in Him.

1.5 QŪNAWĪ ON THE LAW

The historical context in which Qunawi presents his views on Islamic law is one in

which the political elite of Konya is Muslim but a large part of the population is Christian

or practitioners of local forms of shamanism. Qūnawī thus tackles the question of the

difference between the knowledge of God that is gained by the observance of Islamic law

and the knowledge of God that is achieved by observing other customs.

He argues that God lets Himself be known through the rules that He emits. A

rule/wisdom[78] (*ḥukm*) is the divine rule that regulates and shapes the divine self- disclosures

that form the transient things we experience in this world. A rule can be shared between the

divinity and the perfect servant, as well as between the divine address (*khiṭāb*) and the

servant addressed: It thus has the form of truth of the truth (*ḥaqq al-ḥaqq*). It is in his

commentary of the Fatiḥa, the first chapter of the Qur'an, that Qūnawī expresses his views

on the philosophical meaning of the revealed Law. I summarize his views in three main

points:

1. *Sharī'ah intensifies the desire to reach and realize the Truth, and it teaches to*
   scrutinize in oneself the rules of the Truth.

Here Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī mentions that a person might disregard Sharīʿah, as he has

felt a joy of knowing God's essence while walking on the Sufi path. Yet this person

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[77] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 218.

[78] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 147, 316. Anthony Shaker translates it as "precept, judgment." I thank Anthony Shaker for having revised this subchapter.

has not really known God's essence. He has only gained a taste of it that he takes for the real knowledge of God's essence. Such a person often disregards the external/exoteric faith. Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī explains that it is due to his disregarding the external dimension of his faith that he will not be guided to the knowledge of the divine essence. Knowing the divine essence is identical with one's annihilation in his own permanent essence while holding firm -- by a power given by the obedience to Sharīʿah -- to the juxtaposition of the opposition between God known without the world and God's reality as it is known in and through the world. This is further confirmed by a passage from the *I'jāz al-bayān*, in which Qūnawī writes,

> We say: The law given to Muhammad is the opposite of any particular law
>
> as it is absolute [*muṭlaq*][79]. It is the one that belongs to the Prophet
>
> Muhammad through his words, his gestures and his inner states. Perfection
>
> is to be found in those that follow his path. The knowledge of God as well
>
> as the contemplation of His reality occur for whom has set his self in the
>
> equilibrium of the middle.[80]

2.   *What Sharīʿah enables is the intensification of the divine succor that leads an individual to rise to the loving election of his relative singularity by the absolute singularity of God.*

Qūnawī draws a hierarchy of the processes of divine support that progressively singularizes the believer along the Sufi path. *Imdād* refers to a

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[79] I translate muṭlaqa as asbolute and not universal as it includes the idea of an absolute separation from all that is particular. In this context, it implies the idea that Islam has the authority over the unymbolizable middle point that separates the absolute character of Islam from all previous particular laws.

[80]   Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 231.

general support. This is the less singularizing kind of divine support. It increases the desire to cross the different degrees of existence that separate one from the presence of God's holiness by intensifying his capacity to differentiate what is repugnant from what is good for him. Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī writes, "The purpose for mentioning that to whom this state of affairs belongs is notification of the prepared souls and succor to the aspirations [al-himam; *sing.*, *hamm*] of the desire to obtain it."[81]

'Inayāh[82] is the most intense divine support, as it is the most singularizing one. This occurs when one gathers all his manifested existence inside his immutable essence.

Sharīʿah offers a hierarchy of these succors. This intensification of the divine succor also makes the person pass (*itib'ār*)[83] from the intellect (*'aql*) to the most inner side of one's heart (*lubb*),[84] as well as from the first intention (philosophical contemplation of God's essence) to the second intention (knowledge of God's wisdom through the rules He emits).

2. *Sharīʿah has two different meanings according to whether it is directed towards the first or the second intention.*

Following Avicenna, Qūnawī distinguishes the first intention (*qaṣd al awwal*) by which a thing that is outside of the mind and brought forth to its attention is known from the second intention (*qaṣd at-thani*) by which the concept that designates the inner

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[81] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 304.

[82] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 185.

[83] Denis Gril, "L'Interprétation par Transposition Symbolique (i'tibâr), Selon Ibn Barrajân et Ibn 'Arabī," in *Symbolisme et Herméneutique dans la Pensée d'Ibn 'Arabî,* ed. Bakri Aladdin (Damas: Ifpo, 2007), 147-61.

[84] Hakim at Tirmidhi (750-869) has already stated the differences between these two forms of cognition. Lubb stands for how the *pole of the time*, the supreme authority of the hidden government of the Sufis, cognizes the divine unity (tawhid). See Al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi, *Exposé de la Différence entre la Poitrine, le Coeur, le Tréfonds et la Pulpe*, trans. Isitan Ibrahim (Beyrouth: Bouraq, 2002), 192 pages.

relations that constitute this same thing are known. For instance, if I see a "horse", my first intention is the object "horse" while the second intention would be its "species".

Inside the context of a Sufi lodge in which philosophical notions are used to translate a wisdom that is received through prayers and recitations of the Qur'an, the word *qaṣd* can also be translated as goal. It refers, then, first to the goal of achieving the knowledge of God as He is outside of my mind and secondly to the goal of achieving the knowledge of the universe that God has via His knowledge of Himself. This is for instant best exemplified in the following sentence by Al-Ghazali who had written: "He does not know the Other by first intentions (*bi-'l-qasd al-awwal*). But He knows Himself as the Principle of the Universe. From this knowledge follows-by second intention- (*bi-'l-qasd al-thani*) the knowledge of the Universe."[85]

Moreover, the equivalence between intention and goal is best seen in a paragraph written by Qashani (d. 1330). He was a pupil of Mu'ayyid ad Dīn al Jandī (d.1291) who himself was a disciple of Qūnawī. Qashani writes in his dictionary of Sufi terms:

> The root of al Qaṣd: the qaṣd is to answer the call of the Truth (*al ḥaqq*) in the hidden aspect of the servant while he is attracted toward the divine instance. It is also the form in the beginning: the stripping of one's bad qualities in order to   become obedient (to the divine Law) . . .
>
> In the metaphysical realities: carrying out the extinguishment and the permanence in the uttmost secrecy of one's (personhood).

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[85] Kwame Gyekye, "The terms "Prima Intentio" and "Secunda Intentio" in Arabic Logic", *Speculum*, vol.46, n.1, (January 1971), 32-38.

And in the end: Qaṣd, the attachment of the essence of all that is

gathered together through the Truthful with the act of sincerity

[*iḫlas*] from the form of the creation. [86]

In this passage, Qashani uses the word qaṣd not in a strictly philosophical fashion but rather as a goal that must be achieved by the Sufi. Moreover, this passage by Qashani introduces us to the idea that Qūnawī's main task was not to teach a philosophical way of reasoning but rather to give an explanation of the wisdoms that the mystical wayfarer receives on his path toward the knowledge of God.

In Qūnawī's view, the knowledge of the first intention is reached by connecting the *'aql* (intellect) to Sharīʿah through the help of the *imdād*. The knowledge of the second intention consists of the contemplation of the plurality of the rules that coordinates the plurality of the existentiated things that are perpetually existentiated through the divine act of being.[87] The knowledge of the second intention connects the person to God's most proximate presence and happens as a consequence of the second above mentioned divine support ('inayāh). Here Sharīʿah receives a new meaning. It is no longer the process through which the desire to reach God's presence is intensified, but the practice of transforming the existential situation man finds himself in, in such a way that it reaches its perfection: an equilibrium between the opposites where God showers His personalizing careful providence ('inayāh) over His people.

Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī writes,

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[86] al-Qashani, *Istilahat al-Sufiyah*, ed. 'Asim Ibrahim al-Kayyali (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2005), Qaṣd. Translation is mine.
[87] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 305-6.

...(the paradigm that suffices the person of understanding) is that the purpose of the first intention is twofold: absolute [*muṭlaq*] and delimited [*muqayyad*]. [What is] absolute is the perfection that issues from the consummation [*takmil*] of the level of knowledge and existence. I have drawn attention to it more than once and only recently, too. [What is] conditioned, in every time and age, is the perfection of that age; it has no other purpose. It occurs through the second intention in such a modality.[88]

3.   *Sharīʿah enables the cognitive movement from a perspective on God grasped through one's   unconditioned root of one's self to a knowledge of God known through the conditional experiences that one feels in this transient world and vice versa.*[89]

According to Qūnawī, *Fiqh*, or the kind of thinking that expresses the Islamic juridical perspective on the world, has five classes, and each category can be defined as having an unconditioned application and a conditional one.

Ḥalāl is what is allowed for each Muslim, such as shortening the prayers for whom is travelling. This category refers to being (*wujud*) as such.

The second category, ḥarām, is what is prohibited for the Muslim, such as extramarital sexual activities. From the perspective of the unconditioned face of the immutable essence that is oriented toward God's Essence, this belongs to the encompassing Truth through which the unconditioned divine self establishes the rules of the plurality of the existentiated things. If one does not abide by the rules set by the encompassing Truth that institutes the plurality of things, then he goes against the very

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[88] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 305-6.
[89] Qūnawī, 306-8.

utmost identity of his own immutable essence (that can be grasped only through the divine act of speech that speaks to it). From the perspective of the conditional world, this category refers to the responsibility one has in not contributing to the dispersion of things from the authority of the uncountable one, *aḥad*.

The third category, *mubāḥ*, refers to what is permissible. It also has an unconditional aspect and a conditional one. The unconditional aspect refers to breathing and twisting one's body and moving, whereas the conditional aspect refers to situations such as drinking water, feeding one's body with substances that do not nourish (pastries, etc.), and all that preserve the necessities of the self.

The fourth category, *makrūh*, comprises all the discouraged things. These are all the manifested things that victoriously affect the self, as this self has to be understood as a result of mixing good and evil, as well as a result of the victory of passions.[90]

The fifth category belongs to the recommended things, *mandūb*. These are all the situations that are weak and hidden and that are patiently waiting for the divine succor to complete and perfect them.

The *maḥkum* is another juridical category that designs what is decreed. For Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, it expresses the transparency of the immutable essence and its manifestation in the world of perceptions. Therefore, the Muslim knows what he has to undertake in the world of perceptions. The *maḥkum* acts then as the sixth category, as a plus one, to the five juridical categories. It thus bears a striking analogy with the sixth negative reality, which is the zero or emptiness that makes it possible for the five presences of the creation to

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[90] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 306-8.

appear.[91] The five presences of the creation include the following: the divine non-manifest, the world of spirits, the world of subtle archetypes, the visible or world of natural forms, and the middle presence that embraces them all.[92]

These five categories of Islamic juridical thinking are linked to states of being in the following manner:

Ḥalāl = All that is permissible and that thus hints toward the perfection of pure divine being

Harām = All that is prohibited and thus hint toward the encompassing Truth through which the plurality and differentiation of things occur

Mubāḥ = All those movements in existence that are not contrary to the pure perfection of being

Makrūh = All those movements in existence that can become contrary to the pure perfection of being

Mandūb = All those movements in existence that are not apparent and that are in need of God's succor

As understood by Qūnawī, Sharīʿah applies then to the Sufi in two different ways:

1. For the Sufi who ascends to God, it enables him to intensify his desire to reach the knowledge of God by feeling the general grace that God bestows on all those persons, Muslims and non-Muslims, who seek God.

2. The Sufi must integrate the whole of his existence inside his immutable essence by reaching the empty middle of the opposites. Here, he experiences the authority of the root of Sharīʿah over the root of his own immutable essence.

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[91] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 243-44.
[92] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 99-100.

He (the Sufi) then passes from the silent contemplation of God's essence to the contemplation of God's Sovereignty that organize His self-disclosures by the rules and wisdoms He emits.

1.6 SYNTHESIS OF QŪNAWĪ'S THEOPOLITICS

A rule/wisdom refers to the act by which God gives mankind the law that must be followed for man to linguistically and cognitively order God's manifestations in the rightful manner desired by God. This rightful order is the power by which man unifies the manifoldness of the creation inside his immutable essence and his immutable essence under the sovereignty of the divine essence.

How is God's rule/wisdom known? Qūnawī quotes the Hadith, "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, therefore I created the creation,"[93] to prove that God's intention moves the world. Moreover, God's desire is known by mystically experiencing the intention that runs through the speech of the Qur'an. Through the meditation on the Qur'an as it is, the Sufi experiences God's sovereignty.

According to Qūnawī's views, the path that leads only to the knowledge of God's essence is imperfect because it gives no awareness of the goal that God has set in His act of creating all that is not Him. It is by knowing God's intention (i.e., God's goal in creating the worlds, beyond the mere knowledge of His eternal being) that the Sufi experiences the perfection of the knowledge of God's reality.

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[93] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 59, footnote 77 Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 129, footnote 20.

The Perfect Human Being is the one, who in the middle between the opposites is the *universal connector of all connections*[94]. He sits in the empty middle between all opposites. Through this power, he has the capacity to draw oppositions closer to one another or to distantiate them from each other.

Having presented how Sadr Din Qūnawī - who was Ibn ʻArabī's immediate heir and first to systematize Ibn ʻArabī's thoughts - shaped his theopolitical views, we ought to move to the twentieth century and ask the fundamental question of this dissertation. *How have French Sufi Perennialists included Ibn ʻArabī inside their own theopolitical views?*

Thus, I first examine the life, religious influences, and thoughts of the founder of French Sufi Perennialism, René Guénon.

2.0 RENÉ GUÉNON: THE UNCERTAIN DAWN OF FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALISM

French Sufi Perennialism received its first intellectual legitimation in the works of the esotericist René Guénon. His work paved the way for the later processes of dogmatization of French Sufi Perennialism and the establishment of a spiritual doctrine in the times of Michel Valsan. The aim of this dissertation is to study the process by which the creation of a French Sufi Perennialist doctrine reframed the teachings of Ibn'Arabī's Sufism by bringing them close to a European theopolitical worldview that was already known by the French-speaking public.

The first part of this chapter deals with Guénon's biography and a presentation of the studies of his oeuvre. The second part presents the intellectual and spiritual landscape that saw the evolution of his thought. The final part of this chapter refers to the study of his

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[94] This formula is mine.

treatment of the three concepts that ground any theopolitical vision in an Islamic context: God's Unity, God's Law, and God's Perfect Human Being.

2.1 RENÉ GUÉNON'S BIOGRAPHY

René Guénon was born in Blois, France in 1886. The writings of his youth show that he grew up in a culture in which the religiosity of Catholicism was experienced through discussions on the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in different towns, strong meditation on the devil and his demons, and finally, a hyper-rationalist philosophy inspired by the philosophy of Thomas of Aquinas.

The apparition of Mary that led to many discussions in Guénon's youth was one that occurred in the small town of Tilly-sur-Seulles between 1896 and 1899. In the year 1896, the Virgin Mary was seen by various citizens of the town of Tilly. During these apparitions, most of the time she did not speak, except for a message to a housemaid in which she asked the maid to build a chapel or basilica in her honor.[95] Guénon was ten years old when his main mentor,[96] Abbé Gombault, wrote two treatises[97] in which he argued that some of these apparitions were a creation of the "agents of the devil," while others should be seen as authentic. What is of interest for this dissertation is that the older Guénon seems to borrow expressions that Gombault used in these treatises, such as "spiritual center" to designate the town of Tilly, "agents" of God or of the devil, and finally, the conviction that the actions of agents of the devil are a "counterfeit" of the actions of the agents of God. For instance Gombault's sentence about the attempts of the

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[95] Henri Le Boulanger, *Notes et Recherches sur les Apparitions de Tilly-sur-Seulles* (Bayeux: Imprimerie Typographique O. Payan, 1896), 17.

[96] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1975), 21-2.

[97] Ferdinand Gombault, *Les Apparitions de Tilly-sur-Seulles: Réponse au Rapport de M. l'abbé Brettes* (Blois: C. Migault, 1896); Ferdinand Gombault, *Les Visions de l'École de Tilly-sur-Seulles* (Blois: R. Contant, 1896).

agents of the devil to cast discredit on the apparitions of Mary in Lourdes as follows: "Des contrefaçons de la céleste apparition . . . commencent à se manifester pour troubler la série des évènements divins."[98] This sentence bears a close resemblance to the description that Guénon makes of the associates of the devil in one of his major works, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*: "c'est là la voie « infernale » qui prétend s'opposer à la voie « céleste » et qui présente en effet les apparences extérieures d'une telle opposition."[99]

Moreover, Abbé Gombault's description of modernity as the counterfeit of the "True Tradition" lurks in the background of Guénon's own interpretation of modernity as a counterfeit of traditional ideas.

Gombault writes the following:

> Leur erreur, portée à son degré le plus extrême, sera celle de l'Antéchrist lui-même prétendant instaurer l'« âge d'or » par le règne de la « contre-tradition » et en donnant même l'apparence, de la façon la plus trompeuse et aussi la plus éphémère, par la contrefaçon, de l'idée traditionnelle du Sanctum Regnum.[100]

In a similar vein, Guénon states:

> Il n'y aurait donc pas besoin de pousser les recherches plus loin et de se donner la peine de déterminer exactement et en détail la provenance réelle de tel ou tel élément d'un pareil ensemble, puisque cette seule constatation montre déjà bien

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[98] Ferdinand Gombault, *Les Visions de l'École* (Blois: R. Contant, 1896), 9.
[99] René Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 258.
[100] Guénon, 269.

assez, et sans laisser place au moindre doute, qu'on ne se trouve en présence de rien d'autre que d'une contrefaçon pure et simple.[101]

However, Abbé Gombault not only investigated phenomena such as the demons and apparitions of the Virgin Mary. His overall outlook combined the belief in a universal tradition that was present in India and influenced Christianity[102] with a strong conviction of the true character of the philosophy of Thomas of Aquinas.[103] This idea of a universal tradition is the core of French Perennialist Sufism. Moreover, the transformation of the philosophy of Thomas of Aquinas into an anti-modern doctrine in 1914 by Pope Pius X followed a longer trend that had started in 1879 with the encyclical *Aeternis Patris*. The strong desire that Guénon had to establish a doctrine that was intellectually rigorous and which could be scholastically studied so as to prepare the era that would come once modernity was destroyed by these agents of the devil was born in this precise cultural and religious context of his childhood.

In 1907, Guénon became a pupil of the school of Martinism that Papus had promoted throughout the country. He quickly rose in the hierarchy of Martinism, a form of Christian esotericism born in the seventeenth century. Originally, Martinism designates the spiritual doctrines of Martinès de Pasqually (1727-1774) as presented in his book *Traité de la Réintégration des Êtres*.[104] In a second phase, these teachings became dogmatized in the lessons given to some disciples by his two main pupils: Louis Claude de Saint-Martin

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[101] René Guénon, *Articles et Comptes Rendus*, Tome 1 (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 2000), 73.

[102] Ferdinand Gombault, *Similitude des Écritures Figuratives* (Chinoises, Egyptiennes, Babylonienne) (Blois: C. Migault, 1915); see also from an "insider" point of view, William H. Kennedy, "René Guénon and Roman Catholicism" *Sophia* 9, no. 1 (Summer 2003).

[103] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 27.

[104] Joachim Martinès de Pasqually, *Traité de la Réintégration des Êtres* (Paris: Chacornac, 1899).

(1743-1803) and Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730-1824).[105] The latter established a Freemason path that sought to put into practice the teachings of de Pasqually: The Rectified Scottish Rite. The basic teachings of the latter understand the fall of "Man" (L'Homme) as a catastrophic event that had produced the present manifest world in which each soul is imprisoned. Each soul thus first needs to be part of the Catholic liturgical life and second, to practice specific theurgic operations that lead to reconciliation with the Godhead. These theurgic operations taught by Martinès de Pasqually seem most probably to originate from an Andalusian and Mediterranean (from the Maghreb to Napoli) magical background, insofar as its vocabulary is often inspired by the book "The Keys of Salomon".[106] Meanwhile, in Germany, the Protestant general field marshal Karl von Hessen-Kassel (1744-1836)[107] and the ultramontanist Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader (1765-1841) promoted these esoteric teachings and taught them to the Christian Kabbalist Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860)[108]. As I intend to show in this dissertation, Molitor's Martinism was, from a conceptual point of view, influential in the construction of French Sufi Perennialism in the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century, Papus mixed Martinism with elements from the Theosophical Society of Helena Blavatsky. Inside Papus's Martinist lodges, Guénon received the highest rank that a pupil of Papus could achieve: the "Unknown Superior." Only one year later, Guénon criticized the teachings of Papus on reincarnation and thus

[105] Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, *Les Leçons de Lyon aux Elus Coën: Un Cours de Martinisme au XVIIIe Siècle*, ed. Robert Amadou (Paris: Dervy, 1999).

[106] Christian Marcenne, "Martinès de Pasqually Militaire" (paper presented at the Colloque du Tricentenaire de Martines de Pasqually, September 18 and 19, 2010).

[107] Gérard van Rijnberk, *Episodes de la Vie Esoterique 1780-1824* (Plan de la Tour : Editions d'Aujourd'hui, 1980), 20.

[108] Katharina Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die Jüdische Tradition* (Berlin: Walter der Gruyter, 2006), 56.

looked for esoteric affiliations outside of Papus's lodges.[109] It was then in 1908 that Guénon established a Freemason lodge, "L'Ordre du Temple." The aim of this lodge was to seek revenge for the killing of the Templars by the Roman Church. The lodge was created after a session of automatic writing and this spiritist session led Guénon to believe that he was a manifestation of a higher authority of the deceased Templars. In fact, "the entity that manifested itself enjoined assistants to found an 'Order of the Temple' which Guenon was to be the leader."[110] This event is important because in the period in which, through the voice of Valsan, French Perennialist Sufism established its coherent doctrine, Valsan was often remindful of Guénon's involvement in this lodge with the following words: "Nous avons d'ailleurs certaines raisons de penser que Guénon savait par lui-même quelque chose sur les possibilités de ce genre, car, à ses débuts, certaines tentatives se sont produites, à partir d'interventions de l'ancien centre retiré de « La tradition occidentale »."[111] Nonetheless, Guénon felt that this spiritual experience provided him with a universal authority that still required him to develop a doctrine of his own, as well as an environment in which he could unfold the whole of the potentialities of the message he had received.

On the 23rd of June 1911, Ivan Aguéli and Guénon founded the society Akbariya, the aim of which was to promote the teachings of Ibn'Arabī in the West. Entrance into this study circle was possible only through cooptation and after a control of the morality of the person who desired to become part of this esoteric group.[112] The society was meant most

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[109] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une politique de l'esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 31.

[110] Jean-Pierre Laurant, "Le Problème de René Guénon ou Quelques Questions Posées par les Rapports de Sa Vie et de Son Oeuvre." *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 179, no. 1 (1971): 41-70.

[111] Laurant, "Le Problème de René Guénon."

[112] Jean Foucaud, "Le Musulman Cheickh Abdul Hadi al Maghrib al 'Uqayli _ Présentation et Annexes Inédites," published March 6, 2013, on the blog *Esprit Universel* and accessed October 16, 2018,

probably to be a place where Aguéli would have prepared French scholars and artists for eventual conversion to Islam and the Sufi practices of the Shadhiliya order. For example, the disciples of Michel Valsan were in possession of mystical poems by Shaykh Elish el Kabir that Aguéli had translated for this purpose.[113] It is unknown if Guénon did practice Islamic rituals such as fasting and daily prayers after he received his initiation by Aguéli in 1911. Yet, we do know that he married his first wife in 1912 according to the Catholic ritual and soon became a philosophy teacher in French public schools.

In 1917,[114] Guénon was sent to Setif in colonized Algeria, and there is also no evidence that confirms his practice of Islamic rituals during this period. However, these years in Algeria seem to have developed in Guénon the conviction that the best way to "protect" what he saw as the traditional perfection of the East was a form of colonization that General Lyautey had established in Morocco. Lyautey's project was to control Morocco by separating the cities into three shares: one part in which the French colonizers would live, a second where the religious and political elite would receive an education that would make indigenous beliefs compatible with the political agenda of the French government, and finally, a last share for the indigenous people inside a city that could be restored but should remain untouched by Western architects. These cities would become

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http://esprit-universel.over-blog.com/article-jean-foucaud-le-musulman-cheykh-abdu-l-hedi-al-maghribi-uqayli-presentation-116346522.html

[113] Jean Foucaud, "Commémoration de la Disparition du Peintre Ivan Aguéli," published October 27, 2017, and accessed October 16, 2018, http://alsimsimah.blogspot.com/2017/10/jean-foucaud-commemoration-de-la.html

[114] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1975), 65-6.

museums in which a "traditional" way of life was invented by the colonizer and militarily protected by its powers.[115]

Debates about the way of colonizing Algeria through assimilation of the indigenous people to the French way of life and the colonization of Morocco through an association of the "weak indigenous" with the "strong" French citizen were prevalent in Freemason lodges.[116] Nonetheless, most of these Freemasons were against the politics of Lyautey and favored a form of colonization that should assimilate the indigenous to the "progressive" values of French society and thus saw Lyautey's royalism and Moroccan politics as an attempt to fight the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Great Orient of France in Morocco declared the following after its first congress in 1920:

> Nous ne saurions trop nous élever contre le régime semi-féodal que nous avons trouvé au Maroc et dont nous nous sommes faits les protecteurs et les soutiens. Tous ces grands seigneurs marocains qui font braire d'admiration des romanciers en mal de couleur locale [les Tharaud en l'occurrence], se rendent compte de l'influence néfaste d'une instruction démocratique largement répandue. Et, pour garder les semi-royautés que nous leur avons créées, ils développent tant qu'ils peuvent l'islamisme dont ils recherchent le soutien. Ils jouent ainsi un double rôle: gardiens vigilants pour nous de la paix et de la

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[115] Daniel Rivet, *Histoire du Maroc* (Saint-Amand: Fayard, 2012), 308; Charlotte Jelidi, *Fès: La Fabrication d'une Ville Nouvelle sous le Protectorat Français au Maroc* (Lyon: Éditions de l'École Normale Supérieure, 2012), 87.

[116] Georges Odo, *La Franc-Maçonnerie dans les Colonies* (Paris: Editions Maçonniques de France, 2001), 93.

sécurité, défenseurs aux yeux des indigènes de leurs droits religieux. Qu'étaient

donc ces grands seigneurs avant notre Protectorat ? Peu de choses.[117]

Here, René Guénon did not follow the mainstream current of the Great Orient of

France, and in 1924, he wrote a text in defense of Lyautey's politics of association to counter

any possibility of an Islamic insurgence against the French rule[118]:

En somme, dans bien des cas (et nous pensons ici à l'Afrique du Nord), une politique

d' « association » bien comprise, respectant intégralement la législation islamique,

et impliquant une renonciation définitive à toute tentative d' « assimilation », suffirait

probablement à écarter le danger.[119]

French nationalism haunts Guénon's philosophies. This is most evident in a

discourse he made ten years earlier, at the dawn of World War I, when he encouraged his

young students to fight bravely and be victorious over the Germans. In this speech, he argues

that of all languages in the world, French is the one that inherits the precision of Latin and

Greek without falling into the traps of eloquence that would transform language in a pure

game alienated from the metaphysical reality it expresses: "Cependant, les Français n'ont

jamais, autant que les Grecs, abusé de l'éloquence, et elle n'est jamais parvenue à absorber

la totalité de leur existence nationale: la Grèce antique est morte de

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[117] Georges Odo, *Les Francs-Maçons au Maroc sous la III° République* (Paris: Editions Maçonniques de France, 1999), 93.

[118] On Guénon's approval of colonization, see Daniel Lindenberg, "René Guénon ou la Réaction Intégrale." *Mil Neuf Cent* 9 (1991), 69-79: "Ne nous y trompons pas: l'auteur d' Orient et Occident ne prêche pas l'anti-colonialisme, ce qui pour lui serait contradictoire (encourager la révolte !) à toutes ses convictions. . . . Guénon prend l'exemple du Maghreb, où l'on ne pourra éviter la revendication nationaliste qu'à condition de renoncer à l'assimilation et de pratiquer « association » en « respectant intégralement la législation islamique ». Du Lyautey en somme, en moins paternaliste "

[119] René Guénon, *Orient et Occident* (Paris: éd. Véga, 1924), 110.

cet abus; la France, elle, n'en mourra pas."[120] This belief that France has a metaphysical

mission and that it is the best language to convey in a strong argumentation the "true"

character of the Perennialist doctrine is an ideological belief upon which French-speaking

Perennialist Sufis have built the legitimation of their doctrine. In fact, the original speech

from which this passage is extracted was published in 1971 by Michel Valsan in his journal

Etudes Traditionnelles.

In 1928, Guénon's wife died from meningitis, and one year later, he met Marie Dina,

the daughter of a rich Canadian industrial entrepreneur and the widow of Farid Dina who

was passionate about occultism and "Oriental traditions." She was already an admirer of

Guénon's metaphysical expositions and thus became, for a short period of time, Guénon's

sponsor. In 1930, they suddenly decided to travel to Cairo, a trip that Guénon had not

planned but one that he nonetheless had wanted to realize since his meeting with Aguéli in

1911: "Je pars pour l'Egypte . . . un voyage dont il était question depuis 1911."[121] The trip

should have lasted five to six months, but he felt at home in Egypt and decided to stay.

In 1934, he married the daughter of a Sufi Shaykh named Muhammad Ibrahim, and

lived far away from the European parts of Cairo. In 1939, his house was bought by John

Levy, a British aristocrat who had converted to Islam after reading Guénon's books. His

financial situation was secured by his copyrights as well as a donation by John Levy.[122]

During his years in Cairo, he was surrounded by a few admirers who shared his

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[120] René Guénon, "Discours Contre les Discours." *Etudes Traditionnelles* (November-December 1971): 242-50.
[121] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une politique de l'esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume   De Roux, 2013),72.
[122] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74-5.

philosophy: the feminist poet and far-right political activist Valentine de Saint-Point (1875-1953); his secretary Martin Lings (1909-2005), who would become one of the main promoters of his philosophy in the United Kingdom; and finally, those who would come to visit him after having read one of his articles on Advaita Vedanta or on Sufism.

The form of Sufism that Guénon frequented in those years was one that had reformed its teachings to suit a more rationalist, "modern," and urban worldview. The shaykh of his Sufi order, Salman ar-Radi, was the first to try to "proselytize" among the new urban bourgeoisie while rejecting the popular and peasant roots of his movement. Luizard tells us the following:

> Symbole de cette modernité qu'elle veut incarner et d'une identification croissante avec les classes moyennes, la Hamidiyya a transféré son siège du quartier populaire de Bulaq, où se trouvait la mosquée et la tombe de Sidi Salama ar Radi pour s'établir dans le quartier des nouvelles classes moyennes de Mohandessin.[123]

In fact, according to E. Bannerth,[124] Guénon's first shaykh, Salman ar-Radi (1866-1939), was the first Sufi shaykh of Egypt to bureaucratize and rationalize the organization and teachings of his Sufi tariqa. He learned this political strategy while he was working in the state apparatus. As Jean-Pierre Luizard writes,

> Sidi Salaman ar Radi, a occupé des fonctions importantes dans l'administration du gouvernment khédivial. C'est peut-être là qu'il s'inspira d'une méthode rationnelle d'organisation de sa confrérie. Au début, du XXième siècle, alors

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[123] Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Le Soufisme Réformiste: l'Exemple de Trois Confréries," in *Dossiers du Cedej, Modernisation et Nouvelles Formes de Mobilisation Sociale. Volume II: Egypte, Turquie* (Cairo: Cedej, 1992), 91-106.

[124] Ernst Bannerth, "Aspects Humains de La Shadhiliyya En Egypte." *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 11 (1972).

que la plupart des orders soufis étaient sur le déclin, la Hamidiyya était en pleine croissance. Cette confrérie a compris, en effet, la première ce que les autres confréries commencent seulement a percevoir: l'importance d'uen autorité centrale et d'un système hierarchié d'organisation. La Hamidiyya fut la première confrérie à se doter d'un texte décrivant la fonctionnement de la hiérarchie confrérique, avec une définition stricte de chaque fonction en son sein . . . Cheikh Salama ar-Radi avait une conception active du recrutement. Il sélectionnait et formait de façon rigoureuse un corps d'élite de la confrérie qu'il envoyait ensuite dans des différentes zawiyas. Le rôle joué par le siège de la confrérie au Caire dans le recrutement des adeptes devint essentiel.[125]

It was also in these years that Guénon encouraged the establishment of Sufi lodges in Switzerland and later in France that should abide by the "exoteric" laws of Islam as well as by the liturgies of the Shadhili Sufi order. Aside from the help he offered in organizing those first European Sufi prayer houses that would transform his abstract teachings to practical engagements, his main activity involved his correspondence with British and French Freemasons. In these epistolary exchanges, he always argued that the esoteric doctrines of Islam could be read according to the secret doctrine of Freemasonry. The paradigmatic description of his quest to find a strong identity between Freemasonry and Sufism is the following:

D'ailleurs, il y a une interprétation symbolique des lettres arabes qui forment le nom d'Allah et qui est purement maçonnique, provenant probablement des Guildes en question: l'alif est la règle; les deux lâm le compas et l'équerre;

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[125] Luizard, "Le Soufisme Réformiste," 91-106.

le ha le triangle (ou le cercle selon une autre explication, la différence entre les deux correspondant à celle entre Square et Arch Masonry); le nom entier était donc un symbole de l'Esprit de la Construction Universelle.[126]

This identity between the doctrines taught in Freemasonry and Sufism is one that was repeated by his pupil, Michel Valsan, when he wrote about the knowledge of Freemasonry, Ivan Aguéli's spiritual guide is supposed to have had:

le Cheikh Elîsh semble avoir eu aussi une certaine connaissance de la situation de la Maçonnerie et de son symbolisme initiatique. C'est ainsi que René Guénon nous écrivait une fois que le Cheikh Elîsh « expliquait à ce propos des lettres du nom d'Allâh par leurs formes respectives, avec la règle, le compas, l'équerre et le triangle ». Ce que disait ainsi le Cheikh Elîsh pourrait avoir un rapport avec l'une des modalités possibles de la revivification initiatique de la Maçonnerie.[127]

Guénon died in 1951 in his home, Villa Fatima, leaving unresolved the ambiguity between which of the two traditions, Freemasonry or Sufism, should be followed.

2.2 STATE OF THE ART OF THE STUDIES ON RENÉ GUÉNON

The timeline of the academic books on Guénon can be divided into three moments. The first moment sees academics and Freemasons write on Guénon. The middle position is occupied by Mark Sedgwick's book *Against the Modern World* (2004).[128] The third moment sees the emergence of the appropriation of Guénon's name by la Nouvelle Droite.

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[126] René Guénon, "Réponses à des Questions Parues dans la Revue The Speculative Mason," in *Receuil* (Toronto: Rose-Cross Books, 2013), 299.

[127] Michel Valsan, "L'Islam et la Fonction de René Guénon," in *Etudes Traditionnelles,* no. 305 (January-February 1953).

[128] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 369 pages.

Before the publication of Sedgwick's major book, French Freemason scholars working in academia had started to approach Guénon with the hermeneutic tools of historical and sociological analysis. Here, I think especially of Jean-Pierre Laurant's (b.1935) book, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (1975).[129] Mark Sedgwick describes Laurant's attitude as apologetic: "Monsieur Laurant's courtesy matched the venerable panelling of the library as he inquired after the progress of my researches, rather as one might ask after the health of a mutual friend. He offered a few suggestions, almost apologetically."[130] *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* begins with a declaration of the desire to write a critical study of Guénon: "an analysis of the life and a critical study of his texts are essential for approaching the centre of his teachings: the esoteric knowledge."[131] However, the book ends with an apology of Guénon targeted at those who claim that Guénon's teachings occupy the spiritual function of judging the present era (here, probably, the adversary is Michel Valsan): "Never did he [Guénon] establish himself as the Judge of the underworlds. . . . The work of Guénon operates or rather co-operates to our inner reversals, it converts our thoughts, or at the least, provokes a shock that enhances our creativity."[132]

Among all these books, the closest to a critical study of the intellectual movement to which Guénon's writings belong is the book by Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (1999).[133]

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[129] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1975).

[130] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.

[131] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1975), 11.

[132] Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon*, 256.

[133] Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 368 pages.

Wasserstrom tries to understand how such authors as Eliade, Corbin, and Scholem handled what they felt was a conflict between their loyalty to "scientific" research and their own "spiritual" quest. In the first pages of his book, Wasserstrom writes, "Scholem alluded repeatedly to his own concerns with this conflict between the intellectual distance and spiritual intimacy: 'Will I, so to speak, suffer a professional death'? but the necessity of historical criticism and critical history cannot be replaced by anything else, even where it demands sacrifices."[134]

How does Guénon fit in this study? Wasserstrom was one of the first to indicate that, genealogically speaking, the first in the modern era to create the hermeneutical device that would be at work in the different Perennialist tendencies was the German Catholic and Martinist Freemason Franz-Joseph Molitor. He writes, "'Tradition' as used in the Guénonist circles was first employed by Molitor as a translation of Kabbalah."[135]

Furthermore, he showed that Eliade owes more to Guénon than what might be expected and that both Guénon and Corbin share a belief in the existence of a pure human race that was originally settled in the hyperborean, arctic space of this Earth, a myth that recalls the Aryan mythologies of the nineteenth century that would be taken over by Indian nationalists, such as Tilak (1856-1920), most probably under the influence of the meta-political program of Paul Deussen[136] and his entourage.

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[134] Wasserstrom, 24.

[135] Wasserstrom, 40.

[136] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarck, *Hitler's Priestess, Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 37-39 as well as Paul Hacker, "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics," in *Philology and Confrontation, Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (New York: State University New York Press, 1995), 273-318.

The reactions of the French Islamologists were quite violent. Pierre Lory,[137] one of the successors of Henry Corbin at l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), presents Wasserstrom's book as "polemical" and accuses him of confusing the history of societies with the history of philosophy. Furthermore, Lory criticizes Wasserstrom for having confused Corbin's presentation of Persian thinkers with Corbin's own philosophy. Finally, he accuses Wasserstrom of exaggerating the influence of Guénon on Corbin and denies any right to think that Corbin might have been a Martinist esotericist. Nonetheless, years later, two books did confirm Wasserstrom's insights. Wouter Hanegraaff clearly indicated the steps of Henry Corbin's Freemason career inside the Martinist lodges, while David Bisson showed the influence of Guénon on Corbin's Martinist career through the intermediary of Jean Tourniac (1919-1995). Hanegraaff writes that Corbin "adopted the metaphysical perspective of his favourite authors as his own, and opposed it in the strongest possible wordings against the 'disease,' 'profanation,' 'corruption,' even 'satanic inversion' represented by historical reductionism."[138] Later, he added that "Corbin's initiation into the Rite Ecossais Rectifié and its inner order, the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte, seems to have filled him with deep enthusiasm."[139]

Furthermore, as any person who studies historiography or social sciences knows, no philosophy exists in the thin air of celestial clouds. Each set of ideas is also a result of social forces. Everyone is free to understand the relationship between social forces and the

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[137] Pierre Lory, *"*Note sur l'Ouvrage 'Religion after Religion,'" *Amiscorbin.com*, accessed January 1, 2016, https://www.amiscorbin.com/journee-henry-corbin/note-sur-l-ouvrage-religion-after-religion- gershom-scholem-mircea-eliade-and-henry-corbin-at-eranos/

[138] Wouter Hanegraff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 299.

[139] Hanegraff, 341-2.

creation of philosophical or even spiritual ideas differently, but no one can deny that both histories are deeply interwoven.

The second major book that takes a step aside from an esoteric production of meanings is Sedgwick's *Against the Modern World* which presents Guénon in his historical context. Sedgwick traces the different historical and political trajectories from the Renaissance to Guénon that gave rise to the emergence of a global Perennialist philosophy in the twentieth century. According to him, from a historical perspective, Perennialist philosophy as it is presented today is mostly a Western construct that was born within modern times (the Renaissance) and that was received by a postcolonial bourgeoisie that was looking for an Islamic form of mysticism spoken in a European language.

The last mentioned book in this second moment of academic studies of Guénon's life and works is Xavier Accart's *René Guénon et les Milieux Littéraires et Intellectuels Français de son temps: l'Histoire d'une Reception*. This PhD thesis is interesting in the sense that it looks at the different audiences that read Guénon from the beginning of his intellectual career to the 1970s. Accart distinguishes three audiences. First, a broad but quite superficial audience in the *années folles*. Second, a smaller audience entirely devoted to the writings of Guénon during the economic crisis that preceded the Second World War. Finally, after World War II, Guénon gained recognition from important French cultural actors such as the publishing house Gallimard, academic scholars writing on Islam or India, and spiritual seekers who would later become famous, such as the journalist Arnaud Desjardins (1925-2011).

Postmodern and far-right interpretations of Guénon mark the most recent moment in the reception of Guénon's work. The academic critical studies of Guénon do not mingle

anymore with the religious production of meanings but with the political ones of the Nouvelle Droite. The movement of La Nouvelle Droite began with Alain de Benoist in 1970 and aimed at renewing the ideology of the far right by integrating those features of far-left theories that managed to move the "masses." An important debate inside these far- right movements concerns the nature of the spirituality that should guide European people. Different tendencies of this extremist movement range from neo-paganism to Catholic traditionalism. Nonetheless, a tendency inside this landscape is to see in Guénon someone who delivers to Europe a tradition that is both universal and European (or better said, Eurasian) and therefore capable of politically regenerating the old continent. It is La Nouvelle Droite that has given new life to the concept of meta-politics. This term designs in their views the strategic decision to diffuse specific cultural ideas and direction inside civil society.

The academic book by David Bisson published in 2013 is titled *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit* (2013)[140]. The aim of the book is stated in the beginning. According to Bisson, René Guénon designed a meta-political program. This program is based on the idea of Tradition, and therefore, one needs to read his work as well as the different receptions of his book through the perspective of this political concept. Meta-political is a concept that designates, in the language of far-right interpretations of Joseph de Maistre's political theories, a metaphysical narrative that should transform contemporary political engagements. Bisson's book contains much historical information that I have found useful, especially when it comes to understanding the complexity of the relationships between

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[140] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 400.

René Guénon and Henry Corbin. However, as always, the illusion of a journalistic and historicist collage of historical information hides an overwhelming political program that needs to be critically interrogated. Thus what is of most interest is that the author appeared on many occasions in conversations with thinkers of La Nouvelle Droite. On May 29, 2013, he appeared with Alain de Benoist on the far-right radio station Radio Courtoisie.[141] On March 11, 2014, he discussed with Jean-Marc Vivenza, a Martinist author who was also for a long time near La Nouvelle Droite,[142] the relationships between the Italian post- fascist philosopher Julius Evola and René Guénon. In the conclusion of his book, Bisson writes, "The new axes inscribe paradoxically the name of Guénon in the contemporary panorama as he becomes the holder of a new spirituality and a figure of counter-cultural movements; two attitudes that have been heavily criticized by Guénon himself." This is precisely what, a few pages earlier, Bisson tells us La Nouvelle Droite made of Guénon since the '70s: combining his ideas of tradition with the postmodern individualization and liquidification of society.

Sufi Perennialists and Guénonians tend to have shifted from similar political positions to mainstream forms of liberalism. In September 2010, the French Guénonian Sufi website leporteurdesavoir.com published a long study written by Jean-Louis Gabin to distance Guénon from far-right movements: *René Guénon Contre l' 'Extreme Droite' et les Ideologies Modernes*. The article cannot be found anymore on that website but can be

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[141] David Bisson and Alain de Benoist, "René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit," *Baglis.tv*, accessed October 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO91ddaNZDg

[142] David Bisson and Jean-Marc Vivenza, "René Guénon et Julius Evola," *Baglis.tv*, accessed January 29, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxkpZkdlax8.

found on the website Scribd.[143] These currents try to extract Guénon from a far-right interpretation of his writings and thus integrate him into a mainstream liberal framework.

Finally, here, another book should be mentioned that was surprisingly published by a French Catholic "mainstream" publishing house: *René Guénon, l'Appel de la Sagesse Primordiale*.[144] This book gathers various authors around the "vocation of Guénon." Here again, the critical perspective is combined with many hagiographic pages. This combination can best be seen in the chapter written by Paul B. Fenton. Fenton's text[145] deals with the presence of Judaism in the writings of Guénon and the history of those Jews who were near to Valsan and Guénon or who used some notions of Guénon to communicate their own interpretation of the nature of Judaism. After historically contextualizing Guénon's assertions on Judaism, Fenton conceives Zionism as an eschatological movement that has both a "particular and a universal function." Furthermore, he writes that Guénon did not know anything about the presence of a "deposit of initiations" inside the Ashkenazi meditations of the Kabbalah.[146] The acceptance of such terms as "initiation" or "deposit" that belong indeed to the vocabulary of esoteric readers of Guénon shows us that Fenton plays on two fields: a Jewish esoteric understanding of religion tainted by a close reading of Guénon's books and an academic critical reading of the French Sufi scholar. All three main groups represented in this book (Guénonian Catholics, Guénonian Freemasons, and Guénonian Sufis) share a common

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[143] Jean-Louis Gabin, "René Guénon Contre l'Extrême Droite et les Idéologies Modernes," accessed August 21, 2016, https://fr.scribd.com/document/95874005/rene-guenon-contre-lextreme-droite-et-les-ideologies-modernes-par-j-l-gabin.

[144] *René Guénon, l'Appel de la Sagesse Primordial*, ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015).

[145] Paul Fenton, "René Guénon et le Judaïsme, in" *René Guénon, l'appel de la sagesse primordiale*, ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015): 280.

[146] Paul B. Fenton, "René Guénon et le Judaïsme," in *René Guénon, l'Appel de la Sagesse Primordial,* ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 249-94.

vision of the Logos. It is, for instance, very hard to find any difference between the way the Muslim Urizzi defines the Muhammadan reality and the Catholic monk Rousse-Lacordaire's Christology. Urizzi writes of the Logos, "la fin rejoint le principe et reflète, dans sa forme finale, l'universalité inhérente à la nature synthétique, totalisante et universelle de la première détermination ontologique,"[147] while Rousse-Lacordaire writes, "En ce faisant, Guénon a précisé que le Verbe est le principe de la « Révélation primordiale », le modèle de toute manifestation, et que ce Verbe-principe est « réellement et substantiellement un avec le Verbe incarné », dont il a affirmé la divinité."[148]

Both define the Logos as what existed before time, then appears in a specific incarnated body (Muhammad or Christ), and in the end of times showing its fullest reality.

2.3 RENÉ GUÉNON'S BOOKS

Three different periods mark Guénon's writing: his adventures in occultist circles from 1909 to 1919, the exposition of his metaphysics from 1919 to 1930, and his last years in Cairo, where the important and mainstream publishing house Gallimard started disseminating his books and thus promoting him outside of occultist and Freemason circles. This final phase can be understood as a time during which Guénon gave more technical advice on how an initiate should travel on the esoteric path to achieve the goal that Guénon assigned for the initiate in his earlier books: self-identification with the first principle, the Self.

Guénon's books that I deal with in the present research can be divided into two categories. The first category is concerned with the ways in which someone desiring to be

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[147] Paolo Urizzi, "Présence du Soufisme dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon," in *René Guénon, la Sagesse Primordiale,* ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 337-65; here, see 357.

[148] Jerôme Rousse-Lacordaire, "Pensée Traditionnelle et Théologie Chrétienne des Religions," in *René Guénon, la Sagesse Primordiale,* ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 430-450.

an initiate according to the standards of Guénon has to behave to walk on this path; the second category involves all the abstract language a similar initiate has to speak if he or she wants to be accepted as an esoteric commentator of Guénon. The process of dogmatization of Guénon's teachings is highly linked with the history of the journal *Etudes Traditionelles*, following Guénon's death. In fact, this journal gathered different articles by Guénon around several themes and therefore constructed the access to Guénon's work. From 1951 to 1961, the person responsible for the publication of Guénon's articles was Jean Reyor (1905-1988).

After having discovered the books of Guénon, Reyor first entered various Freemason lodges. Later, in 1943, Reyor[149] converted to Islam and entered the group of Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), a Swiss reader of Guénon who thought to implement a combination of the French esotericist's philosophy and his own *völkisch* vision of spirituality in a Sufi lodge led by himself. Being unsatisfied with his new Islamic identity, Reyor ultimately returned to Christianity and contributed to the creation of a Guénonian esoteric Christianity in his three books that belong to the series *Pour un Aboutissement de l'Oeuvre de René Guénon.*[150] After Reyor's departure from les *Etudes Traditionnelles*, Michel Valsan became the editor. From 1961 to 1974, Valsan made his own mark (the synthesis between Ibn 'Arabī and Guénon) on the construction of the interpretation of

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[149] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 95-100.

[150] Jean Reyor, *Pour un Aboutissement de l'Oeuvre de René Guénon: Les Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, vol. 1, Arche Milano, coll. "Biblio Unicorne," 1991; Jean Reyor, *Pour un Aboutissement de l'Oeuvre de René Guénon: La Franc-Maçonnerie et l'Église Catholique*, vol. 2, Arche Milano, coll. "Biblio Unicorne," 1990; Jean Reyor, *Pour un Aboutissement de l'Oeuvre de René Guénon: L'Ésotérisme Chrétien,* vol. 3, Arche Milano, coll. "Biblio Unicorne" 1991.

Guénon's books while also leaving some space for Guénonian Masons and Guénonian Christians in the journal.

I present here briefly examples of the ways by which editors have constructed competing dogmatizations of Guénon's writings. Each editor wished to establish a doctrine out of scattered writings of Guénon and pursued this systematization in different ways. *Initiation et Réalisation Spirituelle* is a book that gathers Guénon's technical articles written after 1945 and was published by Jean Reyor in 1951, following some instructions received by Guénon himself before his death. David Bisson[151] correctly sees this book as an invitation addressed to the readers of Guénon to start putting into practice what they have read in his theoretical books and thus start an active quest for a Sufi shaykh or Freemason lodge. Meanwhile, a French group of Guénonian Freemasons founded the lodge *La Grande Triade* in 1947. In the '50s, the lodge had already lost its vitality. The year of Guénon's death, 1951, was a year of crisis in the circle of Guénonian readers, and the book could be read as an answer to this crisis. In fact, in 1951, Michel Valsan established a Sufi group under the influence of Guénon.

Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage is a collection of articles and reviews that were posthumously gathered by Reyor in 1964 in two volumes. As the title indicates, the target was clearly the Freemasonry who, in those post-war years, continued to be divided between those who looked for a metaphysical transformation of their person and those who wished to politically transform French society. The collection of articles by Guénon tries to sustain the idea of the existence of an esoteric tradition that was active in France through the French Freemasonry. Among those lodges that carefully

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[151] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 99.

read Guénon, the main one was *La Grande Triade,* which started in 1947 and welcomed all those disciples who did not want to convert to Islam and looked for a "Western path."[152] Nonetheless, in 1964, this lodge was not very active anymore, and Freemason Guénonians tended to go to Jean Tourniac, a French Catholic and Martinist Freemason, or to Roger Maridort, who founded both a Sufi lodge and a Freemason lodge in Turin, Italy, between 1961 and 1977.

In 1970 and 1973, Roger Maridort (1903-1977) published two books that also gathered articles of Guénon. He sought to articulate his differences from the way Valsan presented Guénon. The main differences between Maridort and Valsan could be condesned as follows. Whereas Valsan never led any Masonic lodge and was careful to link his Sufi lodge to the historical ones in Tunisia and Egypt, Maridort in contrast established a cultish group separated from the lives of Sufis in the Arab world and openly tried to construct a synthesis between Sufi and Freemason practices[153]. Maridort later edited the articles of Guénon in two different books: *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (1970) and *Aperçus sur l'Ésoterisme Islamique et le Taoïsme* (1973). Both books were attempts by Maridort to become the only inheritor of Guénon's teachings.

In fact, 1970 was the year in which the journal directed by Maridort, *Rivista di Studi Tradizionali,* severely attacked Valsan for being an "accomplice to the adversary": the hypothetical chief of counter-initiation movements and thus the devil and the antichrist.[154]

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[152] Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit,* 206-7.

[153] Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit*, 330.

[154] Bisson, *René Guénon, Une Politique de l'Esprit*, 331. Here, Bisson does not give the full reference of the article: Giorgio Manara, "De la Confusion en Plus: Planète Plus, et les Prétendus « Disciples » de René Guénon." *Rivista di Studi Tradizionali*, 33 (1970).

2.4 GENERAL COORDINATES OF RENÉ GUÉNON'S PHILOSOPHY

René Guénon's philosophy can be divided into three sections:

- a metaphysical one that presents the reality of the first principle beyond the opposition of being and non-being;

- a cosmological one that presents the degrees of manifestation of the first principle from its supreme self-identity to the sensible manifestations of its reality in this world; and

- a political one that tries to find a historical era that could serve as an example to prepare the times after the dissolution of modern times. This perfect society is, according to Guénon, divided in three casts: The Sacerdotal cast is an emanation of the first principle; the royal cast that is a manifestation of the cosmic intellect; and finally, the cast of the workers who serve the aforementioned ruling groups. The fourth cast is one that works for the three other casts. [155]

Below, I focus on a presentation of the metaphysical and cosmological coordinates of Guénon's philosophy. The book in which Guénon presents a foundation of his metaphysics was published in 1925 and is titled *L'Homme et Son Devenir selon le Vedanta*.

The knowledge of the Vedanta is identified by Guénon with the knowledge of the "Universal" that is beyond any philosophical system, since a system reflects a point of view of the Universal and not the Universal itself. The knowledge of the Universal is a metaphysical one in the sense that it includes what is beyond the manifestation of the Self

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[155] René Guénon, *Introduction Générale à l'Etude des Doctrines Hindoues* (Paris: Editions Vega, 2009), 203-204.

(that Guénon identifies with being) and non-being (which Guénon identifies with the possibilities of manifestation inherent to the first principle or Self): "le Suprême Brahma Lui-même, c'est-à-dire Brahma « non-qualifié » (nirguna) dans Sa totale Infinité, comprenant à la fois l'Être (ou les possibilités de manifestation) et le Non-Être (ou les possibilités de non-manifestation), et principe de l'un et de l'autre, donc au delà de tous deux."[156]

Each manifested thing is then a manifestation of a possibility of manifestation of the "Supreme Brahma," or first principle. The process of individualization of a manifested possibility is given by the polarization of the reality of the first principle in an active Self and in an undifferentiated substance on which the self reflects itself: "Purusha et Prakriti nous apparaissent comme résultant en quelque sorte d'une polarisation de l'être principiel."[157] The limit between the substance and the first principle indicates the difference between a state of reality in which the unity is a material one that defines a thing according its quantity and the pure self that is pure quality and that in its universality encompasses the whole of what is manifested and what is not manifested:

> Ce qui n'a pas de limites, c'est ce dont on ne peut rien nier, donc ce qui contient tout, ce hors de quoi il n'y a rien; et cette idée de l'Infini, qui est ainsi la plus affirmative de toutes, puisqu'elle comprend ou enveloppe toutes les affirmations particulières, quelles qu'elles puissent être, ne s'exprime par un terme de forme négative qu'en raison même de son indétermination absolue.[158]

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[156] René Guénon, *L'Homme et Son Devenir Selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1925), 15: "la métaphysique est essentiellement la connaissance de l'Universel."
[157] Guénon, 58.
[158] René Guénon, *Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre* (Paris: Editions Vega, 1984), 15.

How does a person overcome the limits of his individuality? The answer is by adhering by an esoteric teaching inside an orthodox religious form, where "orthodox" means, for Guénon, that this specific religious or spiritual practice (Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism) is under the authority of the sages of the universal tradition. What this teaching then performs in the consciousness of the initiate is a transformation by which he becomes identical with the universal intellect and by which the first principle orders the degrees of its manifestation in the cosmos.

How does he become identical with the universal intellect? The answer is by contemplating the reflection of the first principle in the center of his being (i.e., his heart):

> Le cœur est considéré comme le centre de la vie, et il l'est en effet, au point de vue physiologique, par rapport à la circulation du sang, auquel la vitalité même est essentiellement liée d'une façon toute particulière, ainsi que toutes les traditions s'accordent à le reconnaître; mais il est en outre considéré comme tel, dans un ordre supérieur, et symboliquement en quelque sorte, par rapport à l'Intelligence universelle (au sens du terme arabe *El-Aqlu*) dans ses relations avec l'individu.[159]

This can be done only if the initiate finds the person who embodies the true character of the universal intellect, a spiritual master who belongs to an orthodox tradition that is under the authority of the sages of the primordial and universal tradition. Once he has found a similar "Guru," he will be able to climb the different degrees of realities until he reaches the purity of the first principle.

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[159] René Guénon, *L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1925), 49.

Guénon then stipulates a first degree of reality, which is the first principle, that is even beyond the second degree of reality that consists of the unity of the first principle. The third degree of reality is the informal reality: the manifestation of the first principle in the archetypal ideas of all the things that are manifested. This degree of reality is followed by the reality of all that is subtle i.e., between the informal idea of the manifested thing and the sensible formal manifested thing. Finally, the last or fifth degree of reality is made up of all the individual things that are formal and manifested:

> On a donc, par une série de principes de plus en plus relatifs et déterminés, un enchaînement à la fois logique et ontologique (les deux points de vue se correspondant d'ailleurs de telle façon qu'on ne peut les séparer qu'artificiellement), s'étendant depuis le non-manifesté jusqu'à la manifestation grossière, en passant par l'intermédiaire de la manifestation informelle, puis de la manifestation subtile.[160]

This dissertation wishes to understand the shifts of meaning that occurred once French Sufi Perennialism was established in France in the twentieth century and thus transformed Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi teachings into a theopolitical worldview that could be understood by their modern French readers. After introducing the biography of the founder of French Sufi Perennialism, René Guénon, I presented the metaphysical coordinates of his worldview. This metaphysical worldview is expressed in a combination of neo-Aristotelian vocabulary (essence, substance, principle) and Hindu notions (Brahma, Purusha, Praktiti). This last point introduces us then to the following question that needs to be answered before I am able to tackle the main problem of the present dissertation:

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[160] Guénon, 77.

What are the two main spiritual traditions that Guénon uses when explaining his metaphysics? In which ways does he use them?

2.5   THE TWO MAIN INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS UPON WHICH GUÉNON BUILDS HIS METAPHYSICAL TEACHING

2.5.1 NEO-HINDUISM

The main tradition that Guénon refers to in his oeuvre is Advaita Vedanta as systematized by the monk Shankara (788-820). It teaches the identity of the Self and the I of the individual, or, to be more precise, their non-duality. According to this spiritual school, all dualities are ultimately an illusion of a mind that, because of its composition, tends to wrongly see divisions and separations where in reality only the supreme self (or first principle) exists. For Guénon, Advaita Vedanta is the tradition that is most clearly expressed, as it does not need to hide its universal message behind allegories such as, according to Guénon, was the case for the Muslim and Christian worlds.

In this sense, the Advaita Vedanta acquires a universal character that allows Guénon to find in any tradition an equivalence with something taught in the legacy of Shankara: "La seule différence, c'est que, partout ailleurs que dans l'Inde, ces doctrines sont réservées à une élite plus restreinte et plus fermée; c'est ce qui eut lieu aussi en Occident au moyen âge, pour un ésotérisme assez comparable à celui de l'Islam."[161]

The main contemporary Indian figure upon which he explicitly relies to defend his arguments is the Indian nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920). Guénon finds in the works of Tilak a confirmation of the idea that the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta belonged to the Aryan people and thus to the primordial people that directly received the spiritual

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[161] René Guénon, *La Métaphysique Orientale* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1951), 6.

teaching of Adam. In a footnote that indicates the reference for his conviction that the origin

of all traditions is to be found in the Vedas as they were known by the people of the Arctic

before the creation of the actual continents, Guénon writes the following:

> Ceux qui voudraient avoir des références précises à cet égard pourraient les
> trouver dans le remarquable ouvrage de B. G. Tilak, The Arctic Home in the
> Veda, qui semble malheureusement être resté complètement inconnu en Europe,
> sans doute parce que son auteur était un Hindou non occidentalisé.[162]

The fact that Tilak was a Hindu untouched by Western civilization is a fantasy that Guénon

manipulates to argue that his metaphysics are unmarred by the decadence of the West. The

conviction that the Vedas have an Arctic origin that dates back to an era that spans from

8000 to 5000 BC is first to be found in books written by European and American Orientalists

of the nineteenth century. They simply replicated on India the persuasion that the nobility of

European countries had a Germanic ancestry that had conquered France and through the

centuries was contaminated by Mediterranean and Semitic beliefs and societies. This is thus

the reason the Indologist Max Müller writes,

> the Brahminical people have brought at an early period the light of civilisation into
> the plains of India; that their language was the language of the nation, though
> varying in different popular dialects, that their religion constituted the groundwork
> of the Indian worship, though modified by local traditions; that their

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[162] René Guénon, *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 37. This belief is also upheld by Henry Corbin, see: Henry Corbin, *L'homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris: Présence, 1971), 65: "*les Hyperboréens symbolisent l'homme dont l'âme a atteint une complétude et une harmonie telles, qu'elle est sans négativité ni ombre; elle n'est ni de l'orient ni de l'occident*".

laws and manners formed the social ties of the Indian world, though often in struggle with heterogeneous elements.[163]

If Müller had an influence on Tilak's views, Müller did not share Tilak's ideas on the Arctic origin of the Vedas. The idea of an Arctic origin of the spiritual nobility of humanity combines views of William F. Warren, who published his book *Paradise Found, the Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole* (1885), with astronomical calculations that were undertaken by Tilak himself. Tilak's nationalist agenda led him, in fact, to look for a proximity between German Indologist views on an alleged Aryan population present in India and his personal fight against the British presence. He found, especially in the Orientalist and Christian esotericist Paul Deussen (1845-1919), an ally on which to rely to reinterpret the Vedas according to his political nationalist agenda. Tilak had read the two English translations of the following books of Deussen: *Elements of Metaphysics* (1894) and *The philosophy of the Upanishads* (1906). Deussen[164] interpreted the formula Tat tvam Asi (You are this) to mean that only the divine Self exists, and for this reason, the evangelical words "love thyself as thy neighbor" mean that, for the "Sage," the neighbor is an illusion. Being an illusion, the illusion is loved only by the Self and for the personal glory of the Self. Many other interpretations of this formula exist, but as Hacker[165] shows, this interpretation was to be found by Tilak in the books of Deussen and nowhere else. This set of ideas enabled Hindu people to import to India German völkisch romantic

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[163] Max Müller, "On the Relation of the Bengali to the Arian and Aboriginal Languages of India," in *Three Linguistic Dissertations Read at the Meeting of the British Association in Oxford* (London: British Association for Advancement of Science, 1848), 319-50.

[164] Paul Hacker, "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics," in *Philology and Confrontation, Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (New York: State University New York Press, 1995), 273-318.

[165] Paul Hacker, "Schopenhauer and Hindu Ethics," 273-318.

conservatism in their process of making a modern nation out of scattered regions controlled by the British Empire.

Aside from Tilak, Guénon seems to have also based many of his ideas on Advaita Vedanta on Henry Thomas Colebrooke's book *On the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus* (1858). In fact, he would suggest the reading of this book to those who were interested in deepening their understanding of the traditions of India.[166] Guénon seems to rely on Colebrooke's belief that the Vedas form the core of the speculative thinking of India. This peculiar idea was, before Colebrooke's reorganization of Indian thoughts inside a colonial framework established by the British administration, nonexistent.[167]

2.5.2 CHRISTIAN KABBALAH

The second tradition that has a powerful presence in Guénon's oeuvre is the Kabbalah.

When Guénon dresses his metaphysical insights with a theological vocabulary combining neo-Aristotelian language (Essence, Intellect, Substance) and Hindu vocabulary (Brahma, Ishwara, Buddhi), he often borrows notions from the Kabbalah. Through his oeuvre, we see the presence of Kabbalistic terms to translate each of the three main degrees of manifestation (informal, subtle, and sensible) into notions that are closer to the esoteric teachings his readers have heard in their occult careers:

> En tous cas, on peut trouver, dans ce que nous venons de dire, l'indication de trois
>
> sens superposés, se référant respectivement aux trois degrés fondamentaux de la
>
> manifestation (informelle, subtile et grossière), qui sont désignés comme

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[166] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le Sens Caché dans l'Oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1975), 147-8.

[167] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion, Postcolonial Theory, India and the "Mystic East"* (New York: Routledge, 1999).130.

les « trois mondes » (Tribhuvana) par la tradition hindoue. – Ces trois mondes figurent aussi dans la Qabbalah hébraïque sous les noms de Beriah, Ietsirah et Asiah; au-dessus d'eux est Atsiluth, qui est l'état principiel de non-manifestation.[168]

The terms from the Kabbalah allow him then to connect the Hindu or neo-Aristotelian words with some Sufi concepts expressed in Arabic. In a footnote in which he explains the reality of the universal substance on which the first principle reflects its universality, Guénon writes:

Pour l'ésotérisme islamique aussi, l'Unité, considérée en tant qu'elle contient tous les aspects de la Divinité (Asrâr rabbâniyah ou « Mystères dominicaux »), « est de l'Absolu la surface réverbérante à innombrables facettes qui magnifie toute créature qui s'y mire directement . » Cette surface, c'est également Mâyâ envisagée dans son sens le plus élevé, comme la Shakti de Brahma, c'est-à-dire la « toute-puissance » du Principe Suprême. – D'une façon toute semblable encore dans la Qabbalah hébraïque, Kether (la première des dix Sephiroth) est le « vêtement » d'Aïn-Soph (l'Infini ou l'Absolu).[169]

In another passage of this same book in which he exposes a coherent vision of his metaphysics, we also find the presence of Kabbalistic terms to underline a connection he sees between a given Hindu notion and a Sufi notion. In the following excerpt, he looks for concepts in the different world religions that express the religious rites undertaken by

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[168] René Guénon, *L'Homme et Son Devenir Selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1925), 59.
[169] Guénon, 107 footnote 1.

the person who embodies the legislative power of the first principle in its act of ordering the cosmos. After having given the Hindu name of "Manu" to this concept, he adds:

> De même que Manu est le prototype de l'homme (mânava), le couple Purusha-Prakriti, par rapport à un état d'être déterminé, peut être considéré comme équivalent, dans le domaine d'existence qui correspond à cet état, à ce que l'ésotérisme islamique appelle l'« Homme Universel » (*El-Insânul-kâmil*).

In a footnote to this quoted sentence, Guénon wishes to explain what the Arabic words, *Insan ul Kamil*, mean. He writes: "C'est l'Adam Qadmôn de la Qabbalah hébraïque.[170]

Moreover, in a footnote to the chapter devoted to the Freemason concept of the Great Architect of the Universe, Guénon presents Sufism as "*Qabbalah musulmane.*"[171]

But is it a Christian Kabbalah—that is, a Kabbalah as understood since the Renaissance by Christian authors who wished to find in the mystical writings of Judaism a proof of the truthful character of Christian theologies—or a Jewish Kabbalah that is tied to a meditation on the Jewish Law?

The difference between the set of texts that belong to the Jewish Kabbalah and those that belong to the Christian Kabbalah is to be found in their use of the expression "Adam Kadmon." According to the Lurianic Kabbalah, the Primordial Man is the first and supreme emanation as well as the most perfect image of the Godhead.

Since the sixteenth century, Christian Kabbalists have identified Adam Kadmon with Christ and the Christian understanding of God the Father with the Godhead of the

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[170] Guénon, 59

[171] René Guénon, *Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage* (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1971), 2:285: "L'«Identité Suprême», qui, envisagée dans ce sens, peut s'exprimer en une équation numérique (littérale) bien connue dans la Qabbalah musulmane."

Kabbalah.[172]

How does Guénon then use the term "Adam Kadmon?"

For Guénon, the manifestation of the cosmos is due to the sacrifice and dismemberment of the primordial man that he identifies with Purusha in the traditions of India and with the Adam Kadmon in the Jewish Kabbalah.[173] It is then the task of the initiate to repeat the ritual by which the primordial man has gathered his dismembered organs and regained his lost unity. In a footnote, Guénon identifies then Purusha with Christ himself: "Dans la conception chrétienne du sacrifice, le Christ est aussi à la fois la victime et le prêtre par excellence"[174] and Christ with Adam Kadmon:

> c'est de la fragmentation du corps de l'Adam Qadmon qu'a été formé l'Univers avec tous les êtres qu'il contient, de sorte que ceux-ci sont comme des parcelles de ce corps, et que leur « réintégration » dans l'unité apparaît comme la reconstitution même de l'Adam Qadmon.

In this respect, it seems that Guénon's cosmological worldview relies more on the interpretation of the Christian Kabbalah than on the Jewish Kabbalah. Furthermore, the set of texts that belong to the Christian Kabbalah focus on the embodiment and enfleshment of the Primordial Man as the expression of an esoteric idea hidden in the Jewish Law that must be uncovered by the Christian initiate. The three esoteric ideas that the Christian Kabbalist finds in the Jewish canon are the Trinity, the Incarnation and the need of the Talmudic discussions on the Law to be fulfilled and overcome by the

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[172] Chistoph Schulte, *Zimzum* (Berlin: Surhkamp Verlag, 2014), 165.
[173] René Guénon, *Symboles de la Science Sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 281-82.
[174] Guénon, 282.

Messiah.[175] In other words, another way of knowing whether Guénon's philosophy is marked by the Kabbalah as such or the Christian Kabbalah is to look for the relation between the Primordial Man (Adam Kadmon) and the concept of the Law.

Guénon distinguishes the initiate who has joined the center of his individuality from the initiate who has become truly universal. The first has joined the point at the intersection between the universal intellect and the universal substance. Using a metaphor that is widely used in esoteric salons, he has realized the reality of the central point of the circle of existence. On the other hand, the second initiate has joined the identity between the central point and all the points that draw the surface of the circle:

> Ceci implique tout d'abord la réintégration de l'être considéré au centre même de l'état humain, réintégration en laquelle consiste proprement la restitution de l'« état primordial », et ensuite, pour ce même être, l'identification du centre humain lui-même avec le centre universel; la première de ces deux phases est la réalisation de l'intégralité de l'état humain, la seconde est celle de la totalité de l'être. [176]

The first who has joined the central point of the circle is identified with the "primordial man" (which Guénon also names Adam Kadmon) or also the "truthful man" (l'Homme véritable). The full actualization of the perfection of the primordial man is identified with the "transcendental man" or also "universal man":

[175] Elliot Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, ed. M.D. Goldish, R.H. Popkin. International Archives of the History of Ideas/Archives Internationales D'Histoire des Idées (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001), 173:139- 87.
[176] René Guénon, *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1996), 207.

Suivant la tradition extrême-orientale, l'« homme véritable » (tchenn-jen) est celui qui, ayant réalisé le retour à l'« état primordial », et par conséquent la plénitude de l'humanité se trouve désormais établie définitivement dans l'« Invariable Milieu », et échappe déjà par là même aux vicissitudes de la « roue des choses ». Au-dessus de ce degré est l'« homme transcendant » (cheun-jen), qui à proprement parler n'est plus un homme, puisqu'il a dépassé l'humanité et est entièrement affranchi de ses conditions spécifiques.[177]

For Guénon, the primordial man is virtually—but not actually—the universal man. Moreover, the universal man is identical with the whole of being and non-being. He establishes the law because his own being has become a law for himself:

Tandis qu'une liberté relative appartient à tout être sous quelque condition que ce soit, cette liberté absolue ne peut appartenir qu'à l'être affranchi des conditions de l'existence manifestée, individuelle ou même supra-individuelle, et devenu absolument « un," au degré de l'Être pur, ou « sans dualité » si sa réalisation dépasse l'Être. C'est alors, mais alors seulement, qu'on peut parler de l'être « qui est à lui-même sa propre loi », parce que cet être est pleinement identique à sa raison suffisante, qui est à la fois son origine principielle et sa destinée finale.[178]

In short, from the perspective of the concept of the law as understood here by Guénon, the law is identical with the divine embodiment of the universal man which is the actualization of the possibilities that the primordial man (which Guénon also names with the Kabbalistic concept of Adam Kadmon) must still actualize. In this sense, it

[177] Guénon, 207.
[178] René Guénon, *Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1984), 106.

might well be said that the law hints toward its fulfillment in the universal man, which Guénon, quoting Paul, also names the "Second Adam"[179] that is, in a Christian framework, the enfleshment of the Son of God that fulfills and invalidates any form of revealed law, especially the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

But, if we have found a Christian Kabbalistic hermeneutical procedure in the way Guénon shapes his thoughts, does he also write positively on famous Christian Kabbalists?

Further confirmation of the strong presence of a Christian Kabbalah in Guénon's oeuvre is given by the esoteric title that Guénon confers to the German Freemason and Catholic Kabbalist Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860). In fact, Guénon wrote a book review in which he quoted Molitor as well as his mentor Karl von Hessen-Kassel (1744-1836). The former is called by Guénon "le Professeur Molitor" while the latter is called "Grand souverain."[180] Molitor's title is an esoteric only as he only taught Martinism inside his Freemason lodges. After the spiritual experience in which Guénon believed himself to have been in contact with the authorities of the universal tradition during a spiritst session at the lodge "L'Ordre du Temple" in 1908, René Guénon soon identified himself with the sacerdotal function, i.e., the one whose inner being is identical with the self-identity of the divine Self and exposes the metaphysical doctrine "as it is." Complementary to this sacerdotal function, the "royal function" (which Guénon confers to Karl von Hessen-Kassel) applies the Metaphysical Doctrine to the society the king

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[179] René Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1964), 98: "Dans le symbolisme de la croix, la première de ces deux réalisations est représentée par le développement indéfini de la ligne horizontale, et la seconde par celui de la ligne verticale; ce sont, suivant le langage de l'ésotérisme islamique, les deux sens de l'« ampleur » et de l'« exaltation », dont le plein épanouissement se réalise dans l'« Homme Universel », qui est le Christ mystique, le « second Adam » de saint Paul."

[180] René Guénon, *Études sur la Franc-maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage*, 2:119.

happens to rule, while the "Professor" (which Guénon confers to Molitor) delivers the doctrine to the students according to their cultural and mental capacities to understand parts of it.

Molitor was a German Catholic Freemason. His life can be divided into two parts. In the first portion of his life, he took part in a deist lodge in which the topics of the French Enlightenment were discussed: Saint John of the Dawn in the Orient (*R.: L de St. Jean, sous le titre distinctif de l'Aurore naissante à l'O.: de Francfort sur le Mein*).[181]

Soon, after Napoleon's departure from Germany, Molitor converted to Martinism. His conversion to esoteric Martinism implied staying exoterically Catholic. During this period, he celebrated black magic rituals[182] and prayed to become a sacrificial victim for the Jews to convert to Christianity. After having closely studied the book of the founder of Martinism, *Le Traité de la Réintégration des Êtres* by Martinès de Pasqually, he wrote four opuses on the Jewish Kabbalah with the intent to lay down the esoteric Jewish teachings in such a way that Jews would become German citizens, and in a second movement, convert to Christianity. He writes of the spiritual life of the Jews:

> Jewish mysticism has not freed the Jewish people by elevating the Jews to the
>
> realm of the Spirit but instead Jewish mysticism has in its exaggeration

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[181] L'Aurore naissante, in *Annales Maçonniques*, vol. 6, Planche des Travaux de l'installation de la R.:L.: de St.Jean sous le titre distinctif de l'Aurore naissante à l'O.: de Francfort sur le Mein, du 12e jour, 4e mois de l'an de la V.L. 5808, 12 juin 1808, E.V., Mayence 1808, 50-60 printed.

[182] Katharina Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die Jüdische Tradition* (Berlin: Walter der Gruyter, 2006), 45. Johan Christian Augusti writes in 1821, "*Even if he is more or less forty years old, he seems destroyed due to the harsh discipline his body undergoes. He has no talent, but works mainly through the power of his influences (Kraftinflusse). Especially women see him as a holy man and people come all over from Moscow to meet him in Frankfurt.*"

thrown the Jews into a state of slavery and has taken away from them any freedom of movement.[183]

Molitor was convinced that German idealist philosophy and his interpretation of Christianity were able to liberate Jews from their perpetual "state of slavery". He writes in a letter dated from July 1841:

Thanks to a young generation of rabbis, Jews have become more civilized. I want truly to believe that Löwi through his sermons has helped Jews to wean away (*entwöhnen*) from the ugly petty jobs of travel merchants (*Schacherhandel*) they practiced. Löwi has contributed to instil in them the feeling of the honour of being a citizen, a bourgeois (*bürgeliche ehre einzuflössen*). (…). The only way to help Judaism is to awaken its lost mysticism and by awaking it to build a bridge that conducts the Jew to Christianity. This will be an important work until the new Jew learns to be interested in the old Kabbalah.[184]

His attitude toward Jews and Judaism that sees them as "eternal children" is best shown by his refusal, which occurred twice, to let Jews become the chairs of the Freemason lodges of which he was an influent member. Molitor accepted the entrance of Jews in his masonic lodges but denied them the possibility of being *Meister vom Stuhl* in 1816 and in 1840, i.e., to embody the authority of the metaphysical unity in front of the Freemason assembly. Katharina Koch writes: "When the mason lodge elected the Jew Carl Leopold Goldschmidt as the *Meister vom Stuhl*, Molitor pinned on the door of the

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[183] Franz-Joseph Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte, oder über die Tradition* (Münster: 1839), 3:125 paragraph 154.

[184] Katharina Koch, *Franz-Joseph Molitor und die Jüdische Tradition* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 288.

lodge the certificate that established the end of the lodge's activities."[185] This action of prohibiting a Jew to become the director of the Freemason lodge is precisely done in the name of ultra-montanist politics that see the superiority of the Christian-German man over the not-quite-German Jewish one.[186]

Guénon discovered the work of Molitor in the books of Vulliaud (1875-1950).[187] Paul Vulliaud was not only an independent scholar of Jewish esotericism but also someone who had followed closely the occultist adventures of Guénon since his times in the Martinist lodges of Papus.[188]

The only French translation of Molitor's oeuvre on his Catholic and Freemason interpretation of the Kabbalah appeared in 1834 and has been translated by Xavier Quiris.[189] It is the translation of the first volume of Molitor's investigations that comprise four volumes. Molitor's name thus appears in Vulliaud's second volume of *La Kabbale Juive* published in 1924 as well as three times in Papus' book *La Cabbale, tradition secrète de l'Occident*, published in 1903.[190] If Papus quotes only from the French translation, Vulliaud seems to have read Molitor's text in its original language, German, as he quotes the untranslated volume II of Molitor's opus, *Philosophy of Tradition*. Vulliaud criticizes Molitor for having translated the Kabbalah in such a way that it would

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[185] Koch, 37

[186] Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Geschichte der Christlichen Kabbala, teil 3, 1660-1850* (Stuttgart: Fromann-Holzboog, 2013), 392-423.

[187] Jean-Pierre Brach, "Paul Vulliaud (1875-1950) and Jewish Kabbalah," in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, ed. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi & Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 129-150; Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 40.

[188] Jean-Pierre Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon ou Quelques questions posées par les rapports de sa vie et de son œuvre," in *Revue de L'Histoire des Religions*, 179, no. 1 (1971): 41-70.

[189] Franz-Joseph Molitor, translated by Xavier Quris (Paris: Debrécourt, 1837).

[190] Papus, *La Kabbale (Tradition Secrète de l'Occident), Résumé Méthodique* (Paris: Georges Carré Editeur, 1892). Molitor is quoted several times: p. 24; p. 26. Papus quotes only the French translation.

confirm the belief in the superiority of the German capacity to build concepts. He then lists several errors of translations made by Molitor in his treatises on the Kabbalah. However, he also concedes to his reader that Molitor is an admirable theosophical thinker: "En critiquant Molitor, il s'agit d'un théosophe que nous admirons à d'autres égard."[191]

There is no proof that Guénon had access to the archives of the Freemason lodges in which Molitor taught his views on the Kabbalah, but the fact that Vulliaud and Guénon are admirers of his mystical insights and that both of them, following the discipline of the arcane, never describe in great details Molitor's doctrine, should lead us on the trail that Guénon might well have received an oral teaching on the nature of Molitor's speculation.

However both Brach and Wasserstrom[192] affirm that Molitor's theosophy must be seen as the first modern systematization of a "universal tradition" that is to be found in the core of a primordial tradition and an eschatological one. Though it has to be noted, that none of them has given a genealogy that goes from Molitor's philosophy to Guénon's doctrine. This point I believe is sufficient to start considering the relations that Molitor constructs between what he calls the "great man" and the "universal man." My intention here is to show that Guénon's views on the relation between the primordial/truthful man and the universal/transcendental man I have presented above, shows strong analogies with Molitor's views on the relations between the "great man" and the "universal man."

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[191] Paul Vulliaud, *La Kabbale Juive* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1923) 2:284.

[192] Jean-Pierre Brach, "Paul Vulliaud (1875-1950) and Jewish Kabbalah," in *Kabbalah and Modernity. Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi & Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 129-150; Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 40.

In a passage in which Molitor clarifies the historical events that have transformed Christianity from a small group that knew the esoteric teachings of Christ to, in early medieval times, a Church that also had a political mission, he introduces the difference between the great man and the universal man.

Molitor writes: "Christ appeared in a human form on Earth and suffered the death of reconciliation so that all of mankind—that is scattered in different individualities and objectively forms the separated parts of the articulated idea of the *great man*- may strive toward" [193] the reconstitution of the great man in which each individual would be at his right ontological and social place. A few pages later he writes also:

> After Christianity has become a religion for different people and thus a clear
>
> spoken conviction shared by many entire societies, it became in the same way
>
> for the individual an objective and external normative power. (…). The human
>
> individual is a free, intellectual and autonomous existence and a world of its
>
> own, but he is equally an integral part of the organic *great man* through which
>
> he develops his intellectual, moral and physical capacities. It is through the *great*
>
> *man*, that the individual will become a concrete man. (…). The individual cannot
>
> be physically or psychologically isolated from his peers. The individual can exist
>
> only as an articulation of the great totality for which he lives and which he exists.
>
> In this great totality, his subjective intellect (Vernunft) is included by the
>
> intellect of the *universal man* and conditioned by him. The intellect of the *great*
>
> *man* (the unitary totality of all mankind) is the general, objective intellect, the
>
> icon of the divine intellect. (…). As the vital

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[193] For the following thoughts see Molitor, *Philosophie der Tradition* (Münster : 1853) 4:23 paragraph 23 and 4:99-101 paragraph 103. Emphasis is mine.

power runs in the physical organs of the body to make it work, so the spirit of the *great man* has an effective power over the individual and exerts, through a magical violence, a spiritual authority over its different members. It is this superiority of the *universal* over the particular that (…) makes out the respect due to the highest authority and that (…) connects all the members of a society together.[194]

The relation, then, between the great man and the universal man has to be understood as follows: To grasp his self-identity, an individual first needs to become one with the abstract idea of the totality of mankind to which he belongs. In this sense, he becomes one with the objective intellect that is identical with the great man. It is only once that the individual has become one with the abstract idea of the totality to which he belongs, i.e., "the intellect of the great man," that he can regain his concrete existence through the magical violence of the universal man that casts him back into his individual form. Molitor's thoughts here bear strong analogies with what Guénon will later explicate in his oeuvre as being the relation between the primordial man and the universal man. First, the primordial/truthful man in Guénon's work is one that has become identical with the center of the circle and that thus has not accomplished his return in the world of forms. He has not yet become identical with the whole of existence:

le centre où se situe l'« homme primordial," et qui est marqué dans le caractère par le point de rencontre du trait vertical avec le trait médian horizontal, au milieu de celui-ci, ne se rapporte qu'à un seul état, qui est l'état individuel humain; au surplus, la partie du caractère qui se réfère proprement à l'Homme,

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[194] Molitor, 4:99-101 paragraph 103. Emphasis is mine.

comprenant le trait vertical et le trait médian horizontal (puisque les deux traits supérieur et inférieur représentent le Ciel et la Terre), forme la croix, c'est-à-dire le symbole même de l'« Homme Universel»[195].

Moreover, the "universal man" is the one that, in Guénon's words, returns to the world of forms, as is the case for Molitor. Guénon writes in an article that the primordial man (which he also calls, following a Christian Kabbalah trend, "Adam Kadmon") has reached the center and thus needs to initiate a "descending realization" that brings him from the first principle to the lower degrees of its manifestations:

il faut remonter, comme nous l'avons dit, au principe commun du manifesté et du non-manifesté, qui est vraiment le Principe suprême dont tout procède et en lequel tout est convenu; et il faut qu'il en soit ainsi, comme on le verra mieux encore par la suite, pour qu'il y ait réalisation pleine et totale de l'« Homme universel.[196]

Between the primordial man and the universal man is the "Intellect." For Molitor, the individual becomes one with the intellect, and then the universal takes on the identity between the individual and the intellect, that magical force that brings the initiate back to his human individual form. For Guénon, the primordial man has ascended to the center of the circle of existence, or the first principle, and as he now is the "universal man," he rules over the cosmos through the intellect.

We see here strong analogies that seemingly confirm the fact that Guénon might well have been aware of Molitor's teachings on the universal man and the great man.

The present dissertation aims to find an answer to the following question:

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[195] René Guénon, *La Grande Triade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 145.
[196] René Guénon, *Initiation et Réalisation Spirituelle* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1967), 254.

If speculative Sufism was established in France in the 20th century through the production of books and the creation of Sufi prayer houses that find in the life and articles of Guénon their initiator, then what European traditions were effective in Guénon's theopolitical interpretation of the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī?

I have first introduced the reader to the biography of Guénon. This has highlighted the importance of the spiritual experience in 1908 in which he felt to have been contacted by the sages of the universal Tradition that is above all the spiritual and religious traditions that are known. This experience gave him the assurance needed to speak from the point of view of someone who has become one with the first principle. This conviction followed him to Cairo, where he frequented a Sufi lodge that followed a reformist Sufism that was well-accepted among the new urban bourgeoisie of the capital of Egypt. In front of his readers, Guénon presents himself as someone who has found in Sufism as it is taught in Cairo the identical doctrine that is taught in European Freemason lodges.

After a presentation of Guénon's books and the studies devoted to his work, I have introduced the reader to the main coordinates of his philosophical thinking as well as the traditions from which he draws to express his insights. His metaphysical speculations are expressed in a language that combines Hindu and Neo-Aristotelian concepts. Furthermore, when these first concepts are linked to Sufi notions or Christian theological concepts, he tends to use a vocabulary that belongs to the Kabbalah—more precisely, to the Christian Kabbalah. The identity between Guénon's concept of the primordial man with Adam Kadmon and the universal man with the "Second Adam" (i.e., Christ) hints toward the fact that the presence of the Christian Kabbalah strongly

shapes Guénon's way of thinking. In fact, he praises the Catholic Kabbalist and Freemason Franz-Joseph Molitor for being a "great professor." I have then shown that there exist strong resemblances between Molitor's use of the concepts of "great man" and "universal man" and Guénon's use of the notion of "primordial man" (also named by him Adam Kadmon) and "universal man." Both intellectuals intend the great man or primordial man as being virtually the universal man. Moreover, both intend the great man or primordial man as having realized only half of his spiritual transformation, as he has not yet returned to creation, the world of forms. This is then realized for both of them only in the universal man who has become one with the "universal intellect."

This overview of Guénon's thoughts and first map of his philosophical way of thinking now needs to be scrutinized more closely, as I have not answered the general question of the dissertation. *How does this general map of Guénon's way of thinking affect the means by which he theopolitically deals with what he thinks belongs to the spirituality of Ibn 'Arabī?*

2.6 RENÉ GUÉNON'S THEOPOLITICAL TREATMENT OF IBN 'ARABĪ'S NAME

2.6.1 RENÉ GUÉNON ON GOD'S ONENESS

Tawhid means literally "proclaiming God's oneness," and is the basic credo of Islam, as it can be heard in the testimony of faith: "*There is no divinity but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet*." It entails both God's unity and the way this unity relates to the plurality of things that we sense in this transient world.

The concept appears in Guénon's article entitled "Et-Tawhid" in *Le Voile d'Isis*, July 1930, 512-516, and in a book review of Edward Jabra Jurji's *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism: A translation and notes, based upon a critical edition of Abu-al Mawahib al-*

Shâdhili's treatise entitled Qawânîn Hikam al-Ishrâq (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1938).

The article "Et-Tawhid" was published in 1930 soon after Guénon's arrival in Egypt. It is signed with the name of two locations and two different dates: "Gebel Seyidna Mousa, 23 shawal 1348 H. Mesr, Seyidna El-Hussein, 10 moharram 1349 H. (anniversaire de la bataille de Kerbala)." The first place relates to Moses' mountain, most probably Mount Sinai, while the second designates the Hussein mosque in Cairo where it is believed that the head of the Prophet's grandson, who was killed in the battle of Kerbala, is buried. The anniversary of the battle of Kerbala is also mentioned in the signature of this article. The signature accordingly presents to his readers Guénon as someone that is fully embedded in the Islamic spiritual life of Cairo. Moreover, the end of the article refers to a spiritual experience that Guénon had in which he felt that all the manifested things melted in the unity of the hot sun that symbolizes the unity of being: "Là, le rayonnement solaire produit les choses et les détruit tour à tour; ou plutôt, car il est inexact de dire qu'il les détruit, il les transforme et les résorbe après les avoir manifestées."[197] This spiritual experience is spoken in a language akin to Ivan Aguéli's own categorization of Islam as a solar religion when Aguéli writes:

> Tout, jusqu'à la perspective, jusqu'aux distances et aux rapports des choses entre elles, ne dépend que de l'astre radieux, qui, maître absolu des horizons, sculpte les montagnes à sa guise et dispose selon sa volonté subite et architecturale les masses de l'immensité . . .

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[197] René Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'Ésotérisme islamique et le Taoïsme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), chap. III, 37-43.

Une idée se réalise au fur et à mesure que ses facultés latentes se déploient au grand jour, que ses ressources se font valoir, et que toutes ses forces jouent leurs jeux. Elle grandit dans toutes les directions, elle se multiplie indéfiniment, tout en restant « Un », c'est-à-dire identique à elle-même.[198]

"Et-Tawhid" begins by stating that the doctrine of the "Unity" that establishes that existence is One is to be found in all orthodox traditions, and most "excellently" in Islam. It is, he continues, only with time that each one of these traditions has forgotten the Unity that transcends its form but that simultaneously is still wrapped up in these "forms," as some of these hide the primordial message more than others: "Si nous considérons l'état actuel des choses, nous voyons que cette affirmation est en quelque sorte plus enveloppée dans certaines formes traditionnelles." The more a form strays away from its primordial and universal source, the more it is immersed in the world of multiplicity and thus the more this form hides the spiritual knowledge of the Unity that transcends all traditional forms. Islam is the traditional form that best expresses the universality of the One that is beyond all traditional forms because of its wide cultural experience of living in countries that are burned by the sun:

Ainsi, l'Unité devient en quelque sorte sensible: ce flamboiement solaire, c'est l'image de la fulguration de l'œil de Shiva, qui réduit en cendres toute manifestation. Le soleil s'impose ici comme le symbole par excellence du Principe Un (Allahu Ahad), qui est l'Être nécessaire.

This is then the most perfect Tawhid according to Guénon that he synthetizes in the formula taught him by Aguéli: *Et Tâhwidu Wahidun* (the teachings on God's unity

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[198] Ivan Aguéli, "Pages dédiées au Soleil," in *La Gnose* 1911 reprinted in Ivan Aguéli, Ecrits pour La Gnose, ed. G. Rocca (Milan: Archè, 1988), 56

are all one). Nonetheless, Guénon claims that to call Islam a monotheistic religion is reductive, because this would refer only to Islam as a form and not as a form that contains in it the symbol of the sun that transcends all religious traditions:

"Le « monothéisme », si l'on peut employer ce mot pour traduire Et-Tawhîd, bien qu'il en *restreigne quelque peu la signification* en faisant penser presque inévitablement à un point de vue exclusivement religieux, le « monothéisme », disons-nous, a donc un caractère essentiellement « solaire. »"[199]

In this article, Guénon does not give the full vision of his metaphysical doctrine as it is exposed in the aforementioned *L'homme et son Devenir selon Vedanta*. He takes it for granted that his reader already knows the basics of his teachings.

The symbolism of the sun then refers to something that is beyond the divine instance that is prayed by the non-Sufi Muslim. How are we to understand this assertion? According to Guénon, the most perfect spiritual experience is the one he names "supreme identity," and that belongs to the Sufi that has realized the highest position in the esoteric hierarchy:

c'est par ce travail intérieur seul que l'être s'élèvera de degré en degré, s'il en est capable, jusqu'au sommet de la hiérarchie initiatique, jusqu'à l'« Identité suprême,» état absolument permanent et inconditionné, au-delà des limitations de toute existence contingente et transitoire, qui est l'état du véritable çûfî.[200]

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[199] René Guénon, *Apercus sur L'Esoterisme Islamique et le Taoisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 42. Emphasis is mine.
[200] Guénon, 28. Emphasis is mine.

To know how he defines this concept of "supreme identity," we need to go back to the book in which he has laid down the foundations of his speculative investigations, *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vedanta.* In the first pages of this same book, he writes:

> Le « Soi » comme nous l'avons vu dans ce qui précède, ne doit pas être distingué d'Âtmâ; et, d'autre part, Âtmâ est identifié à Brahma même: c'est ce que nous pouvons appeler l'« Identité Suprême,» d'une expression empruntée à l'ésotérisme islamique, dont la doctrine, sur ce point comme sur bien d'autres, et malgré de grandes différences dans la forme, est au fond la même que celle de la tradition hindoue.[201]

Here he claims that the highest spiritual realization is best described by a concept - "supreme identity"- that comes from the Islamic tradition but that nonetheless, to be explained clearly, must be presented through "Hindu" words. If Atma is, in Guénon's conception of the Veda, the "self" that is not modified by the accidents of the world and Brahma the absolute perfection of the first principle, then the identity between the two is the identity between the first principle from which all is manifested and the self that is the deepest ipseity of all things beyond their manifested qualities. Nonetheless, in this same fundamental book, Guénon argues that Brahma must be divided into an unqualified Brahma and a qualified divinity, an impersonal God and a personalized divinity:

> il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'il est « qualifié » (saguna), et « conçu distinctement » (savishêsha), tandis que Brahma est « non-qualifié » (nirguna), « au delà de toute distinction » (nirvishêsha), absolument

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[201] René Guénon, *L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1925), 40. Emphasis is mine.

inconditionné, et que la manifestation universelle toute entière est rigoureusement nulle au regard de Son Infinité.[202]

When Guénon then states that Tawhid, in a strictly theological sense, is an imperfect spiritual realization, it is because according to him, Sufism, or the esoteric side of Islam, hints toward the supreme identity that is reached by the yogi and the Sufi alike and that is beyond the divine personality (*Brahma Saguna*) that the ordinary Muslim prays to. In other words, according to Guénon, the "exoteric" Tawhid hints toward the personalized divinity (*Brahma Saguna*) while the "supreme identity" hints toward the first principle (*Brahma Nirguna*). But, from where then does Guénon retrieve, inside Islamic texts, the notion of supreme identity? From Aguéli, who translated a short text he had wrongly attributed to Ibn 'Arabī[203] and that he named "L'identité supreme dans l'ésoterisme islamique." Furthermore, Aguéli used to compare Ibn 'Arabī with the popular and occult-initiated playwright Villiers de l'Isle-Adam:[204]

> Deux grands hommes de races, d'époques et de religions différentes ont donné de cette réalité matérielle qui est au-dessus du plan sidéral, et dont le non-temps se sert comme d'un véhicule, une formule tellement lapidaire que ce serait un vandalisme que de vouloir la changer. L'un de ces deux est l'extraordinaire penseur hispano-arabe Mohyid-din ibn Arabi, surnommé avec raison « Es-Sheikhul-Akbar », c'est-à-dire le plus grand de tous les Maîtres de la cérébralité musulmane. L'autre est l'admirable écrivain celte Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Je

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[202] Guénon, 30.

[203] Michel Chodkiewicz, introduction to Awhad ad-Din Baliyani, *Epitre sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1981), page.

[204] For Villiers de l'Isles-Adam's occultism, see Pierre Mariel's introduction to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Axël* (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1969), 4-15.

crois que, parmi tous les auteurs connus, eux seuls ont parlé de la « sensation de l'éternité. »[205]

When Villiers de l'Isle Adam wished to express the spiritual perfection by which a person experiences the identity between his personality and eternity, he puts the following words in the mouth of one of his characters: *"Car l'éternité dit excellemment Saint Thomas est seulement la pleine possession de soi-même en un seul et même instant."*[206]

This occultist interpretation of one of Aquinas' teachings designates in Villier de l'Isle-Adam's occultism the difference between the one who has crossed the world of illusion to become himself, pure being, from those who are caught in their own illusions.[207] In other words, the concept of supreme identity is first a literary and occultist notion that Aguéli borrows from Villiers de l'Islam-Adam's personal philosophy of religion (one that combines Thomas of Aquinas with modern occultism) and then is used by Ivan Aguéli to give a title to the French translation of a text that is wrongly ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī[208].

Guénon approximates the word "Tawhid" by claiming that it is less perfect then the concept of "supreme identity" because it hints toward the personalized divinity (Brahma Saguna) while "supreme identity" describes the identity of the self with the first principle (Brahma Nirguna, Unconditionate God, Foundation of all that is).

2.6.2 RENÉ GUÉNON ON THE UNIVERSAL MAN

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[205] Ivan Aguéli, "Pages dédiées au Soleil," in *La Gnose* 1911 reprinted in Ivan Aguéli, Ecrits pour La Gnose, ed. G. Rocca (Milan: Archè, 1988), 56

[206] Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Axël*, in Oeuvres Complètes, 549.

[207] Bernard Vibert, *Villiers L'Inquiéteur* (Toulouse: Presse Universitaire du Mirail, 1995), 83.

[208] Michel Chodkiewicz, forward to Awhad ad-Din Baliyani, *Epitre sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1981). I enter into greater detail on this text that was believed by Guénon to be written by Ibn 'Arabī but was in fact drafterd by Ibn Sab'in in the next chapter.

How then does the perfect identity of the self and the first principle relate to Guénon's understanding of the universal man? First, by cancelling the exclusive difference between oppositions in their middle, their center. This operation is undertaken by the primordial man that has extinguished his "myself" (Fr. moi) inside the divine station (Ar. *maqam el-ilahi*):

"par cette « extinction, » on atteint la « station divine » (*El-maqâmul-ilahi*), qui est le point central où toutes les distinctions inhérentes aux points de vue extérieurs sont dépassées, où toutes les oppositions ont disparu et sont résolues dans un parfait équilibre. « Dans l'état primordial, ces oppositions n'existaient pas. »[209]

It is by gaining the center that the primordial or truthful man becomes one with the personalized divinity. That is to say, the God that is prayed to by the common Muslim when he evokes the Tawhid or by the non-initiated Hindu when he evokes, according to Guénon, the figure of Ishwara: "Il n'est pas d'autre voie que celle de la Connaissance, soit « non-suprême » et conduisant à Îshwara, soit « suprême » et donnant immédiatement la Délivrance."[210]

However, this religious person is still not unified with the first principle. To do this, he needs to move away from the center by actualizing all the possibilities inside the primordial man; he has to become one with the manifestation of the whole of existence and thus enflesh the universal man:

l'être qui est ainsi arrivé au point central a réalisé par là même l'intégralité de l'état humain: c'est l'« homme véritable » (tchenn-jen) du Taoïsme, et lorsque, partant de

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[209] René Guénon, *Apercus sur L'Esoterisme Islamique et Taoisme* (Paris: Galllimard, 1973), 48.

[210] René Guénon, *L'Homme et Son Devenir Selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1925), 233.

ce point pour s'élever aux états supérieurs, il aura accompli la totalisation parfaite de ses possibilités, il sera devenu l'« homme divin » (cheun-jen), qui est   l'« Homme Universel » (El-Insânul-Kâmil) de l'ésotérisme musulman.[211]

We must now recapitulate to understand how Guénon organizes his thoughts and thus be able to answer the question of how, according to him, the metaphysical unity juridically rules over the plurality of things.

2.6.3 RENÉ GUÉNON ON THE LAW

From a chaotic point of view, each thing is the opposite of the first principle, while from the point of view of the erasure of its specificities into the being that is universalized through the universal man, each thing is the first principle. Guénon tries in his first attempt to sketch down his metaphysical views:

Ainsi, le Parfait est le Principe suprême, la Cause première; il contient toutes choses en puissance, et il a produit toutes choses; mais alors, puisqu'il n'y a qu'un Principe unique, que deviennent toutes les oppositions que l'on envisage habituellement dans l'Univers: l'Être et le Non-Être, l'Esprit et la Matière, le Bien et le Mal?[212]

He answers then that each thing has become one with the universal spirit; thus, from being an external object, it becomes the inner identity of the universal spirit itself. The duality and strong oppositions are resolved in what is now seen as their identity:

Lorsque l'homme parvient à la connaissance réelle de cette vérité, il identifie luimême et toutes choses à l'Esprit universel, et alors toute distinction disparaît pour lui, de telle sorte qu'il contemple toutes choses comme étant en lui-même, et non

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[211] René Guénon, *Apercus sur L'Esoterisme Islamique et Taoisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 52.

[212] René Guénon, "Le Démiurge," in *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 9-26.

plus comme extérieures, car l'illusion s'évanouit devant la Vérité comme l'ombre devant le soleil.[213]

What is then the function of the revealed law inside this schema? The function of the law is to encircle the oppositions that Guénon has enclosed inside the form that he names the exoteric version of Islam and thus to be superseded by the universal man who moves beyond the personal god that is prayed to by the common Muslims.

L'enveloppe ou l'écorce (*el-qishr*) c'est la *shariyâh*, c'est-à-dire la loi religieuse extérieure, qui s'adresse à tous et qui est faite pour être suivie par tous, comme l'indique d'ailleurs le sens de « grande route » qui s'attache à la dérivation de son nom. Le noyau (*el-lobb*), c'est la *haqîqah*, c'est-à-dire la vérité ou la réalité essentielle, qui au contraire de la shariyah, n'est pas à la portée de tous, mais est réservée à ceux qui savent la découvrir.[214]

He then ascribes to the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī the idea that the Sufi Muslim departs from the law given to all to follow a path that guides him toward the center of the circumference (*Tariqah*). From there, he reaches then the totality of all that is as he becomes the universal man who overcomes the oppositions and thus also the law given to the common Muslims:

il est le « Premier et le Dernier » (*El-Awwal wa El-Akher*), est aussi « l'Extérieur et l'Intérieur » (*El-Zâher wa El-Bâten*), car rien de ce qui est ne saurait être hors

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[213] Guénon, 9-26.

[214] René Guénon, "L'écorce et le noyau," in *Apercus sur l'Esoterisme Islamique et le Taoisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 29.

de Lui, et en Lui seul est contenue toute réalité, parce qu'Il est Lui-même la Réalité absolue, la Vérité totale: *Hoa El-Haqq*.[215]

When Guénon is faced with a non-European spiritual vocabulary (such as here, for instance, Arabic words), he first applies to these the metaphor of the "form" to circumscribe them in an enclosed space that *juridically limits the extension of the meanings* that can be attributed to these words. Secondly, he structures the inner space of this form by finding fundamental oppositions: the First and the Last, the First and the Eternity. This process enables him to fix a point that becomes the center of this form. To this center— which is still inside this form—he applies the name of the personalized divinity that rules over this form. The primordial man (which he names with the Christian Kabbalistic Adam Kadmon) is the one that has regained this center and has become one with the personalized divinity prayed to by ordinary Muslims.

Once Guénon has reorganized the vocabulary of a given spiritual language according to the pattern described above, he moves one step further. Guénon then finds in the tradition that he has enclosed in a form, the elements that he thinks allude to the One that transcends all the traditional forms and that is "wrapped" inside that tradition's exoteric teachings. Therefore, he states that the primordial man (Adam Kadmon) has not yet reached spiritual perfection and thus has some potentialities that have not been actualized. This is why (here Guénon borrows from a masonic language first systematized by the Catholic Kabbalist and Freemason Franz-Joseph Molitor) the primordial man has to become the universal man that goes back from the center to the world of forms, to the periphery of the circle, to the multiplicity. This is then when the

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[215] Guénon, 36.

multiplicity is no longer understood as chaotic, but as an expression of the same universal existence of the first principle expressed in the universal character of the perfect/universal man.

In other words, Guénon organizes his thoughts theopolitically in such a way that the One rules over the multiplicity by encircling the multiplicity in a juridical form and subsequently in oppositions that are erased (action undertaken by the primordial man) at the center and then overcome by the unity of being (proper to the universal man) that transcends them and thus also transcends the form structured by these same oppositions. The multiplicity becomes One through the extension of the being of the universal man over the singularity of each single thing.

2.7 RESULT OF OUR INVESTIGATION: HOW DOES GUÉNON INCLUDE IBN 'ARABĪ IN HIS THEOPOLITICAL VIEWS?

This dissertation asks how the name of Ibn 'Arabī has been included in the theopolitics forged by French Sufi Perennialists. Guénon is the founding father of this intellectual and spiritual current. I have argued that Christian Kabbalah acts as the main European tradition through which Guénon approaches the name of Ibn 'Arabī.

The duality between the great man that has realized the center of the circle and the universal man that has realized the identity of his identity within the whole of being mirrors a duality already present in Molitor's Christian Kabbalah. For Molitor, the great man reaches the center of being and Christ acts as the universal man that encompasses in his   reality   the   whole   of   being.

For Guénon, the name Ibn 'Arabī designates the universal man who, inside the Islamic form, transcends its law given to the common Muslims to overcome the

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imperfect reality of the personal divinity that is prayed to by the common Muslims, and

reach the whole of being beyond all existing forms, beyond all oppositions.

3. 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, the "French al-Azhari Scholar:" Making Guénon's French Sufism fit with Egyptan Reformist Sufism

The present dissertation analyses the theopolitcal appropriation of Ibn 'Arabī's name by French Sufi Perennialists. The establishment of a French Sufi Perennialist doctrine is founded on Guénon's writings as well as on the personal ties he made with Egyptian Sufi scholars in the latter part of his life in Cairo.

I have shown above that Guénon uses an Aristotelian and "neo-Hindu" framework to settle the main coordinates of his universalist metaphysics. Secondly, the dialectic used to move from one religion to another and give life to his metaphysics is one that was first used by Christian Kabbalists. What I have not shown yet is the sum of reasons that enabled his philosophy to be labeled "orthodox" by the University of al-Azhar. Without this approval, Guénon's philosophy would not have reached an Islamic audience and thus, most probably would remain in the hermetic circles of mystical Freemasons or devoted readers.

The al-Azhari scholar with whom Guénon was in contact is 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, who became rector of this university in 1968. The present chapter presents 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd's intellectual trajectory to ask in what ways his own philosophy articulates itself with Guénon's thoughts. In other words, how did Mahmūd receive Guénon's philosophy, and in what ways is this reception dependent on Mahmūd's own meta-political agenda? To what extent did Mahmūd share Guénon's theopolitical views? Did he understand Ibn 'Arabī in the same way Guénon interpreted him?

3.1. State of the Art of the Studies on Mahmūd and Guénon's Interactions

Thierry Zarcone, French Orientalist and specialist on the presence of Freemasonry in the Ottoman Empire, argued in a chapter that belongs to a hagiography of Guénon[216] that Guénon influenced Mahmūd to such an extent that all of Mahmūd's actions and thoughts must be understood through Guénon's own teachings. This same position is defended by Abu'Rabi in an article published in 1988. He defends the idea that 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd and Guénon had the same meta-political purpose: conveying a message to the "pure intellectual elect" that "restores the traditional roots of modernity." Moreover, he presents the thoughts of both scholars as identical:

> Both Guénon and Shaykh A.H. Mahmud affirm that the manifestations of this essential message were many, corresponding to different historical and geographical circumstances Metaphysical knowledge is the supreme condition
>
> any human being can achieve, since eternal and universal truth are the backbone of such knowledge.[217]

What these two articles dismiss is that Mahmūd encountered Guénon on his return from France, where he wrote his PhD dissertation. Mahmūd spent eight years, from 1932 to 1940, in France. According to Aishima,[218] this journey had a long-lasting influence on his thoughts. Mahmūd's encounter with Guénon is thus one in which Mahmūd had been transformed by France and where he learned to speak (not only grammatically but foremost culturally) Guénon's language. Both Zarcone and Abu'Rabi

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[216] Thierry Zarcone, Le Cheikh AL Azahr Abd Al Halim Mahmud et René Guénon: Entre Soufisme Populaire et Soufisme de L'Elite, in *L'Ermite de Duqqi* (Milano: Arché, 2001), 268-86.

[217] Ibrahim Abu Rabi, "Al Azhar Sufism in Modern Egypt," *Islamic Quaterly* 32, no. 4 (1988), 207-22.

[218] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: IB Tauris, 2016), 39 and 80.

do not take this important point into consideration when analyzing the meeting between Guénon and Mahmūd.

Moreover, in an article in which Meir Hatina[219] presents the historical contexts that made possible Aguéli's interactions with his Sufi Shaykh, and later Guénon and 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd's meeting, he argues that Mahmūd used Guénon's writings only to defend his own ideas on Sufism and Islam. The article by Hatina is replete with errors and shows a strong ignorance of Guénon's metaphysics, such as in the sentence "Guénon's strong attraction to phenomenology, esotericism and "active imagination" revealed his aim to depolitize Islam." Guénon had a strong aversion to contemporary philosophical movements, and to my knowledge did not write anything on Husserl's philosophy. Moreover, he held imagination to be a very imperfect faculty. The expression "active imagination" belongs to Henry Corbin's interpretation of German Idealist philosophers and is very far from Guénon's focus on the intellect. Furthermore, Hatina does not ask in what ways Mahmūd's thoughts and Guénon's thoughts meet. What is the concept that builds an articulation between Guénon's traditionalist philosophy and Mahmūd's reformist meta-political agenda?

Another group of scholars treats their relationship as being unimportant and thus perceive it as a later reconstruction made by French guenonian Sufi scholars who looked to the interaction between Guénon and Mahmūd for a legitimation of their own philosophical views. Mark Sedgwick simply states that any evidence of Mahmūd's Traditionalism is "unconvincing."[220] He then later argues that his meeting with Guénon

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[219] Meir Hatina, "Where East meets West: Sufism, Cultural Rapprochement, and Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (August 2007), 389-409.

[220] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 78.

did not affect his conviction that Islam had abrogated all religions. For Mahmūd, according to Sedgwick, Guénon is then a Frenchman who supports his claims on Sufism and Islam.[221] If Sedgwick acknowledges that Mahmūd finds in Guénon a combination of Frenchness and an Islamic way of life, he does not tackle the question of why Mahmūd finds in Guénon's books something akin to his own philosophical thoughts. If it is not Traditionalism *per se*, should we not look at the other bridges between these two philosophies?

A final book should be mentioned. Hatsuki Aishimi has written a whole book on 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd by interrogating the processes by which he has become an important public intellectual in Egypt. She has only a few pages on Mahmūd's encounter with Guénon.[222] Nonetheless, she remains silent on the existing connection between these two, noting only that Mahmūd wrote a short biography of Guénon's life that was first titled *The Muslim Philosopher: René Guénon* (1953) and later, in a second edition, *The Knower of God, Abd al-Wahid Yahya*, which belongs to a booklet on the Shadhiliya Sufi order to which both scholars belonged. The text is basically the same, only the audience has changed. The first audience is one that is interested in Islamic philosophy, while the second is made of Sufi members of the Shadhiliya Sufi order.

This dissertation wishes to ask in what ways Guénon's understanding of Sufism set the path for the establishment of a tradition of French-speaking speculative Sufism that has theopolitically reframed Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual insights. This process would not have been possible without Mahmūd's support and promotion of Guénon's philosophy.

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[221] Sedgwick, 243.
[222] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 44-48.

Mahmūd is in fact the native Muslim authority that confirms, in the eyes of Guénon's pupils and heirs, the alleged Islamic orthodoxy of Guénon's views.

To understand Mahmūd's reception of Guénon's philosophy, I need first to present the social context in which Mahmud lived.

Mahmūd's times saw the re-emergence of Kalam (Islamic apologetic philosophy based on Greek philosophies, with a particular attention given to Al-Fārābī) as an attempt to reform the teachings of Islam in al-Azhar and Sufism in Cairo in such a way that it would suit the requirements to be perceived as akin to the modern West.

I then introduce Mahmūd's philosophy and focus on the two scholars that have marked his intellectual journey. Here, I insist on the idea that Mahmūd performed a combination of al-Azhari scholarship and French conservative and counter-revolutionary scholarship (in the line of French monarchists of the times, and moreover, Guénon himself). The third part presents the general resemblances and differences between Guénon's perception of Sufism and Mahmūd's perception of this same spiritual discipline. Even if they belonged to the same Sufi path they do not understand the relation between Islam and Sufism in the same manner.

The final part of this dissertation tackles Mahmūd's understanding of the notion of the unity of being. The doctrine of *waḥdat al- wūjūd* has throughout history been ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī. Nonetheless, Mahmūd and Guénon have two different interpretations of this doctrine.

3.2. FROM PREREFORMED SUFISM TO REFORMED SUFISM: THE SLOW CONSTRUCTION OF A REVERSED ORIENTALISM IN THE REFORMATION OF AL-AZHAR

Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd was born in 1910 in the Egyptian countryside. After studying at the school in his town and memorizing the Qur'an, he entered the famous institute al-Azhar in Cairo to become an "Islamic scholar." In these days, al-Azhar was joined to the idea of the Naḥda, a movement that, under the pressure of French and British Orientalism, was willing to "rationalize" Islamic practices around an "intellect," understood as the faculty to distinguish the common good from superstition and popular fantasies.

His family was a well-established family of al-Salam village in the Nile Delta of Sharqiya Governante. Through his father, 'Abdal Halim Mahmūd had been already acquainted with Muhammad Abduh's ideas (1849-1905), one of the main promoters of reform in the nineteenth century.[223]

The "common good"[224] was then understood as that which connects an Islamic legacy with the development of European civilization (French, in the first instance), which was perceived as "modern." "Modern" was a signifier used by Naḥda actors for recognizing and legitimizing individuals' supposed "capacity" to recognize the "truthiness" of natural causality. Indeed, since 1872, the Egyptian government had established, against the religious authorities of the time, a university to teach physical and natural sciences, geography, and mathematics. This new institution was welcomed by those philosophers who sought to combine Islamic theologies with European interpretations of what "nature" is. Nature is then no more understood as a set of occasions (according to the views of 'Asharism) that express God's perfections but as having a

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[223] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 32-33.
[224] Armando Salvatore, "Dilemmas of Religious Reform, Reinstitutionalizing the Sharīʿah," *Egypte, monde arabe* 34 (1998): 99-114, http://ema.revues.org/1503?lang=fr.

relative autonomy that enables it to be ruled by the rationalist reason of the modern state and its technological sciences:

> For the Ulama of al-Nahda, scientific and technological progress such as railways and stem engines were not the work of the devil. On the contrary, they said, the Europeans had created them by the use of reason, given to man by God so that he could understand and master nature.[225]

In 1930, the transformation was complete, and many Egyptian religious leaders could easily defend the existence of a European notion of nature.[226] The Naḥda movement wanted to bring nature into the field, where nature as such did not exist. Therefore, the problem of public/private space was, until then, not understood around such dichotomies as natural causality (or the space of the commons because it affects all humans) versus supranatural (or the space of personal encounters with divinity). The transformation toward an urbanization of Egypt and the construction of a modern rationalist paradigm for Islamic theologies date back to the eighteenth century.

Mustafa abd al-Raziq and later his pupil ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd defending al-Fārābī belongs to a *longue durée* process initiated with Muhammad Ali's (1769-1849) quest for building a central state in Egypt. Indeed, Peter Gran writes:

> Fiqh[227] as it was studied in the eighteenth century in Egypt was based on Kalam,[228] that is, ultimately on Aristotelian logic   When the State was strong, fiqh had a systematic character and flourished; but as the central State weakened in the later

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[225] Addi Lahouari, *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 31.

[226] Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt, A Biography of Muḥammad Husayn Haskal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 10-11; see also Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism in Egypt*, 1760-1840 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), chap. 7.

[227] Meditations on Islamic legal doctrines.

[228] Islamic rational apologetics.

eighteenth century, fiqh and Aristotelian logic were reduced to a more and more elementary position in the fahrasa, the course taught by the shaykh.   Aristotelian logic was at low ebb in Egypt during the period of commercial predominance. On the whole precapitalist commercial centers with their large artisanal populations were not characterized by social relationships which could not be subsumed in this framework.   It recovered in the early nineteenth century as the State took over the capitalist sector and subsumed it under its administration.[229]

Al-Fārābī (d. 950), one of the most famous philosophers in the Islamic world, then no longer was the name of an ancient philosopher but was invested with a new meaning: the promise of building a modern and rational state in Egypt, which could be compared to the perceived success of the modern French and German states. Reformist Sufi scholars and Sufi *shuyukh* (pl. *shaykh*) then used his "Virtuous City," which sets Plato's king- philosopher as the ruler of a perfect society, to reorganize Sufi teachings and Sufi orders. In an article about the Shadhiliya order to which both Guénon and Mahmūd belonged, Bannerth writes that the description of its path in a book published in 1931 and 1970 by an eminent Sufi master, Salman ar-Radi (1866-1939), was heavily influenced by Al-Fārābī's virtuous city. He then states, without explanation, that this is the reason why Guénon felt at ease in a similar reformist and Aristotelian environment: "Il n'est pas étonnant que René Guénon, converti à l'Islam en 1912, soit devenu membre de cette confrérie."[230]

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[229] Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Captialism in Egypt*, *1760-1840* (Austin, Texas: Syracuse University Press, 1998) 50 and also 179: "Utilitarianism and realism, which I take to be the dominant expressions of classical capitalism, were carried forward attached to a universal Aristotelian logic."

[230] Ernst Bannerth, "Aspects humains de la Shadhiliyya en Egypte," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire* 11 (1972): 237–40.

Valerie Hoffmann inquired ethnographically about the Sufi practices and beliefs that were not overtaken by state-reformed Sufism. She argues that four Sufi saint models were active when she was in Egypt (around 1990). Among these models, we find "the type of Sufi the government and the Supreme Council of Sufi Orders would consider exemplary." Central to this model is the idea that the intellect is the main faculty through which the Sufi joins the godly reality. The intellect is the intermediary between the "Godly reality and the worldly reality."[231] This form of Sufism, as Aishima argues in a paragraph in which she describes Maḥmūd's admirers, is found predominantly in the bourgeoisie of Cairo, who are well travelled and have often undergone long academic studies.[232]

Nonetheless, this reformist agenda should not be seen as an acceptance of "Western" superiority in philosophical and religious matters. Monica Corrado has widely proven, in a book on the years when al-Azhar shaped its reformist agenda, that its scholars strengthened the Kalam tradition to welcome a "Western" way of thinking but simultaneously have also opposed the spirituality of the "East," against what they saw being the materialism of the "West".[233]

The specific epistemic location of al-Azhar reformist scholars is best described by Corrado in the following sentence: "Because of the 'monopole on modernity' by European scholars, the (reformist Egyptian) authors did not have the possibility to develop an indigenous vocabulary to designate their modern and Egyptian identity."[234] In this sense, they do practice an "Orientalism in reverse," in which they interiorize the subalternization

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[231] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 284–5: "the gnostic operates by his intellect."

[232] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 4–5.

[233] Monica Corrado, *Mit Tradition in die Zukunft: der taǧdīd-Diskurs in der Azhar und ihrem Umfeld* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011), 206.

[234] Monica Corrado, *Mit Tradition in die Zukunft: der taǧdīd-Diskurs in der Azhar und ihrem Umfeld* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011), 218.

of the East by the West to then simply capsize it. If this is the general movement by which the reform of Sufism participates in the radical modernization of the entire Egyptian society, what were the features of unreformed Sufism?

This reform of Sufism and, more generally, of Islam slowly cancelled a public sphere in which "the science of ḥadīṯ" was predominant. Before the reform, each speech was justified not by formal logics but by presenting itself as an echo of an initial speech between the Prophet and his companions, or between God and His prophet.[235] The latter social epistemology permitted the profusion of singular mystical experiences in Damascus at least until World War I.[236]

The alternative model here to the abovementioned reformist intellectual Sufi model is the one that focuses on devotion toward the Prophet's family. Hoffmann asked an old and "poor" man who worked as a trustee of a shrine, "What is Sufism?" This is the answer she received: "Sufism means love for the family of the Prophet. The Prophet is our intercessor and the one who brings us close to 'God.' . . . It is the love which purifies us and brings us close to 'God.'"[237] This devotion leads toward an extinguishment of one's attachment to the world by drowning in the figure of the Prophet. Yet, this path is severely criticized by the al-Azhar Sufi Council, which abides by a modernist "intellectual" form of Sufism.

We then understand here the two conflicting epistemologies: one is based on the desire that pushes the Sufi toward his mystical goal, while the other establishes a

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[235] Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism in Egypt*, 1760-1840 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), chap. 7.
[236] Gran, 102.
[237] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 284-285.

mysticism of the intellect. The first nonreformist Sufism intends a public speech as a speech based on the science of ḥadīt and thus translates this epistemology as the difference between the one who speaks and is beloved with the one who answers the call and is the lover. In the middle position is the figure of the intercessor, as expressed in the sentence above by the "old and poor Sufi." On the contrary, reformist Sufism intends a public speech as one based on the intellect's rationality. The intellect then separates the nature of common society from the supernatural, which belongs to a personal mystical experience. I translate this difference between nonreformist Sufism and reformist Sufism in the following way:

Nonreformist Sufism

Who: The Sufi disciple (often from a lower social class)

Dynamic that moves the disciple toward God: Love and speech

In the middle position between God and the disciple: Muhammad the Intercessor

Reformist Sufism

Who: The Sufi disciple (often from the bourgeoisie)

Dynamic that moves the disciple toward God: A rational approach toward God based on the distinction between nature (the common good) and the supernatural (personal encounters with the divinity).

In the middle position between God and the disciple: The intellect as understood by Al-Fārābī against the "materialism" of the "West".

3.3. Mahmūd's Biography

Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd had Mustafa Abd al-Raziq (1885-1947) as a teacher, who was a student of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), one of the leading founders of the

Naḥda movement. Following the footsteps of Muhammad Abduh, he looked into the reception of Plato and Aristotle by al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Nasir ad Din at-Tusi (1201-1274) to find an Islamic rationality that would be reconcilable with "modern" intellectuality. Mustafa Abd al-Raziq upheld al-Fārābī in great esteem and presented him as a true Islamic philosopher. This connection with his teacher made him enter the alliance between Egyptian rationalist religious scholars and French intellectuals during the colonial and postcolonial times. In fact, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, wrote, together with Louis Massignon (1883-1962), a book whose goal may be said to be a reinvestment into the significance of Sufism. In it, he sees a decay in Sufism that led Sufis to be no longer like the early ones. Contemporary Sufis are no longer devoted to "morality":

> We must admit that we intentionally overlooked the role of the decay of Sufism in its late ages; the role which we still witness and which transformed the methodology of sincerity, gratitude and goodness into a tool for deceit, greed, ignorance and corruption.[238]

Mustafa Abd al-Raziq therefore encouraged a distinction between rational truth and religious truth, wishing to make a strong epistemological basis for the autonomy of rational thought. In this philosophical agenda, Sufism can produce subjectivities that translate the abstract considerations of rationalist metaphysics into a vocabulary used to describe a simple "moral" life. In this sense, according to Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, an "elegant" Sufism has to be distinguished from an inelegant and popular Sufism. Elegant Sufism corresponds here to the morality of the person able to be part of the new public and common space. Intellect is the notion that differentiates the two forms of Sufism. It

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[238] Mustafa abd al-Raziq and Louis Massignon, *Al Islām wa-l Tasawwuf* (Cairo: Dar al-Sha'ab, 1979).

distinguishes between good common space and fantasies that are believed to have caused the stagnation of Islamic civilization.

ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd went to Paris after having studied at al-Azhar. There, he studied for eight years at La Sorbonne in Paris. In France, Mahmūd felt a strong anxiety due to his feeling of being disconnected from his Egyptian and religious life; at the same time, many French Professors from different disciplines (psychology and aesthetics) refused his application to start a PhD thesis.[239]

Finally, he achieved his PhD in 1940. His thesis, written in French, is on an early Sufi named al-Muhasibi (781-857).[240] After having thanked his father, he thanked Louis Massignon, his main mentor. Massignon was a Catholic Orientalist and monarchist. A specialist in the Sufi Hallaj, he was also an antimodern who, similarly to Guénon, saw in the West a process of spiritual decay.[241]

How does ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, in his autobiography, explain how Massignon put an end to this anxiety? It is interesting how ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd narrates his meeting with Massignon. In the following lines, he mentions how they together decided upon the subject of his PhD thesis.

Finally, I met Professor Massignon, and we discussed this subject [Islamic Sufism] for a long time, and we concluded this discussion by mentioning the book *Islamic Sufism* by al-Muhasibi. It is the first arranged book on the subject of Islamic Sufism. The printed version of this book by Muhasibi at this time was

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[239] Hatsuki Aishima and Armando Salvatore, "Doubt, Faith and Knowledge," 43; concerning the nature of this anxiety, see Homi Bhaba's concept of third space as exposed, for instance, in Eleanor Byrne, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Palgrave Mc Millan, 2009), 139 until the end.

[240] Abd al-Halim Mahmoud, *Al Mohasibi*, *Thèse pour le doctorat à la faculté de Lettres de Paris* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940).

[241] Christian Destremeau and Jean Monlecon, *Louis Massignon, Le cheikh admirable* (Paris: Editions Le Capucin, 2005), 459.

difficult to find. I searched for the manuscripts in the libraries of al-Azhar and of the Dar Kitab al-Misrya. Professor Massignon lent me all the manuscripts he had of Muhasibi so that I could begin my work.[242]

What we see here is that Massignon—here the French man—helped him to overcome his cultural alienation by giving him a "signifier" from his own country (Egypt). This was a reversed Orientalism incorporated by the previously alienated man who then made for himself the "East" Massignon projects onto the history of Egyptian Sufism.

In his PhD thesis, al-Muhasibi is presented as one of the "elegant Sufis" Abd ar-Raziq mentioned earlier. According to ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, al-Muhasibi is an example of vie morale (moral life). This French expression is then what he pushes as the meaning of the signifier *aḫlaq*, which was used in classical times for defining the Sufi treatises on purification of the character. Indeed, in this same PhD thesis, Mahmūd tells us that he was willing to show the existence of ancient Sufis who upheld the individual's active "autonomy" toward the divine, criticizing in this sense all the Sufi practices that have strongly emphasized attitudes by which man's will is erased in the divine will.[243]

Who, then, is responsible, according to the young ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, for the decay of Sufism and the stagnation of Islamic civilization? The "foreign influences," which were very strong on people like Ibn ʿArabī, caused the stagnation of Islamic civilization, he believed. This foreign influence was such that, according to Mahmūd, Ibn ʿArabī did not tie himself to the literal understanding of the scriptures but exaggerated the "hidden aspects" of Islam:

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[242] ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, *Hamdulilah ḫaḏa ḥayati* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arifa, 1980), accessed March 26, 2015, http://abdel-halim.org/Thanks%20God-%20This%20is%20my%20life.pdf.

[243] Abd al Halim Mahmoud, *Al Mohasibi*, *Thèse pour le doctorat à la faculté de Lettres de Paris* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940).137 and 244.

Nombreux sont les mystiques qui ne sont pas toujours d'accord avec les foqaha (juriconsultes), car ils ne se tiennent pas constamment dans les limites exigées par 'usul el fiqh (principe du droit). . . . Leur interprétation du Livre Sacré montre qu'ils ont exagéré l'emploi de ce que l'on a appelé "sens caché". Ibn 'Arabī, par exemple, excelle en cela. [244]

Most probably, 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd here was criticizing the Sufis of his time. Indeed, both popular Sufi practices and nonreformed urban Sufi teachings carried out the word of Ibn ʿArabī. On this topic, Hoffmann writes: "They did understand IbnʿArabī's teachings as a teaching on the hidden aspects of the Prophet Muhammad and they believed it to be orthodox"[245] and fully compatible with al-Ghazali's (1058-1111) version of Sunni Islam. This is precisely the kind of Sufism that the young Mahmūd tried to rewrite according to the epistemological coordinates of the new mystical rationalism that had emerged in Cairo since 1872.

On the day of his defense of his PhD thesis at La Sorbonne, a Russian friend put in his hand a book, *The Mysteries of Dante* (1940), asking him to deliver it to 'Abd al-Wahid Yahya—René Guénon under his Islamic name. Back in Cairo, Mahmūd tried several times to meet the French Sufi but Guénon did not accept visits for a long period of time. The French esotericist was convinced that he had been attacked by devilish spirits and thus refrained from meeting new people. Nonetheless, a few months later, Mahmūd was able to meet Guénon with the help of Hector Madiro, a minister plenipotentiary of Argentina in

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[244] Abd al Halim Mahmoud, *Al Mohasibi*, *Thèse pour le doctorat à la faculté de Lettres de Paris* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940).69.

[245] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 58. "Perhaps it is significant that while many Egyptian Sufis describe Ghazali as a great teacher, Ibn ʿArabī's title remains "the greatest shaykh." See also 30, 55, 300–16, and 369.

Egypt: "Our hearts were beating fast. In a short while, a tall shaykh with a respectful manner, and dignified character opened the door and appeared before us. His face was almost emitting light."[246]

An important detail should be stated here that hints toward the fact that the relationship between Guénon and Mahmūd might have been one of two mirrors, whose images are reflected in the mirror that faces them. Ever since his arrival in Cairo, Guénon had dressed in Islamic garments, while Mahmūd proudly dressed in a European fashion upon his return in Cairo. Mahmūd started to dress in an "Egyptian" garb only in 1961—twenty-four years after his first meeting with Guénon.

What we can guess from these mirroring effects is that Mahmūd saw in Guénon a European willing to dress as an Egyptian Muslim, while Mahmūd was performing the identity of an Egyptian who had been intellectually trained in Europe. This performance of a French identity by Mahmūd is a feature that, according to Aishima, is still remembered today by his pupils and close readers. While reading a text by Mahmūd with emeritus professor Dr. Abd al-Aziz at the Girls College at al-Azhar, Aishima was told that because "Mahmūd was in France for too long, he had forgotten the basic rules of Arabic."[247] Dr. Abd al-Aziz taught Aishima that a thought is not presented in Arabic as it is conveyed in a French context. According to him, Mahmūd presented his thoughts in a French manner. This perception by an Egyptian intellectual that Mahmūd had become a French scholar was also confirmed by another encounter Aishima made. Her friend and specialist of pre- Islamic poetry told her the following about Mahmūd's writing:

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[246] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 45.
[247] Aishima, 78.

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The way Shaykh 'Abd al-Halim develops his arguments is entirely French, meaning that he starts from the minor points and at the end he explores the most important points at great length. He employs Islamic expressions so that his message reaches a Muslim audience but his ideas are very French.[248]

Finally, Mahmūd performed a French identity until his late years. In a radio program on the Qur'an's divine character, Mahmūd uses a procedure by which he quoted different French Orientalists without giving their academic titles or the books in which they seem to support his argument on the scriptures. What counts then in Mahmūd's assertion is only the Frenchness of these names and the "scientific" character that these names carry with them in the imagination of his Egyptian audience. Aishima writes, "His listing of French scholars conveys an image to the audience that he had mastered both traditional Islamic and modern Western sciences."[249]

If the framework within which Mahmūd met Guénon was one in which Guénon "Orientalized" his French identity and Mahmūd "Frenchized" his Egyptian identity, how did this meeting affect Mahmūd's attitudes toward Sufism? Mahmūd met Guénon on different occasions at his house as well as in the Abu 'Ala Mosque, in circles in which the name of Allah was repeated. During these Sufi gatherings, Guénon frequently entered a mystical ecstasy that seized his body in such a manner that it was entirely shaking.[250] Al- Azhar was highly critical of similar Sufi liturgies, as they often give way to disharmonic movements in which people enter into a trance state and seem to be possessed more by

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[248] Aishima, 81.

[249] Aishima, 122.

[250] Larbi Jeradi, "Modalité de la réalisation spirituelle chez Abd el-Kader et chez René Guénon ('Abd al-Wâhid Yahyâ)," in *Abd el-Kader, un spirituel dans la modernité* (Damas: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2012), accessed November 7, 2018, http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/1844.

devilish spirits than by the beauty of the spirit. However, through Mahmūd's fascination with Guénon, he became reconciled with the practice of Sufism. If Massignon allowed him to overcome his anxiety of being an Egyptian in modern France by appreciating his study of early Sufis such as Muhasibi, Guénon allowed him to be at peace with the practice of Sufi liturgies and thus overcome a sense of general defiance against Sufi liturgies.

This appeasement toward Sufism—made possible by his meetings with Massignon and subsequently Guénon—condensed itself in his meeting with the person who became his Sufi master in 1960, nine years after Guénon's death: Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattah al-Qadi, founder of the Qadiy al-Shadhiliya Order in Shiblanga, Egypt[251]. Abd al-Fattah al-Qadi left this world in 1964, so Mahmūd met him in the last four years of his life. In presence of his shaykh, Mahmūd evolved from a theoretical knowledge of Sufism to one experienced and embedded in his everyday life. From 1961 onwards, he wrote mainly on biographies of Sufi masters that belong to the Shadhiliya Sufi path, in "which he also included vivid descriptions of his spiritual interactions with the Shadhili awliya (saints)."[252]

In these times, another theopolitical transformation happened in his life that was not documented by Aishima. On February 15, 1975, the parliament of Egypt banned Ibn 'Arabī's books because, in their perception, his books bore an "un-Islamic" presence. The newspaper *al-Akhbar* presented the parliament's decision with the following words:

> The People's Assembly agreed during yesterday's session to discontinue and prohibit the publication of the remaining sections of the book al-Futuhat al-Makyya by Ibn 'Arabī, as well as the rest of his works, and to prohibit the distribution of sections already published and to collect the published material

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[251] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 47.
[252] Aishima, 49.

from the markets. This is due to his extremism, which spreads confusion among Muslims. [253]

Most probably, the Egyptian parliament and some scholars of al-Azhar feared that the reading of Ibn 'Arabī's writings would encourage the creation of messianic movements in which a teacher might feel the spiritual presence of the Mahdi[254] and thus decide to fight the government. However, Mahmūd did not comment publicly on this matter. In the 1970s, he defended the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī discreetly and in private conversations. Moreover, his son, who later wrote an article in defense of Ibn 'Arabī's school of thought in the newspaper *al-Ahram*,[255] affirmed that his father did approve of Ibn 'Arabī's Meccan revelations, *Futuhat al-Makiya*. Although 'Abd al-Halīm's son Mani' did write a defense of Ibn 'Arabī's views, he did not practice Sufism and was satisfied that in a TV fiction devoted to the life of his father, 'Abd al-Halīm had not been depicted as a "strange" Sufi but in a "correct" way.[256]

Is there a strong difference between Guénon's practice of Sufism and Mahmūd's practice of Sufism? Both belonged to the Shadhili Sufi order but to different branches. Guénon followed a shaykh who had settled from the countryside to the bourgeois quarters of Cairo. Salman ar-Radi had reorganized his Sufi order to suit the rationalization of the Islamic reform pushed by the Naḥda movement and enacted by the state bureaucracy. Salman ar-Radi was also the first to try to "proselytize" among the new urban bourgeoisie

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[253] Emil Homeri, "Ibn Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press and Politics in Sadat's Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1986), 462–77.

[254] The "rightly guided" is an Islamic eschatological figure who, together with Christ, will put an end to the undertakings of the Antichrist.

[255] Mani' Abd al-Halim, "Hawla qadiyat wahdat al-wujud," *al-Ahram*, Mar. 1, 1979, 1.

[256] Hatsuki Aishima, *Public Culture and Islam in Modern Egypt* (London: I.B Tauris, 2016), 108.

while rejecting the popular and peasant roots of his movement. Luizard tells us[257]:

> Symbole de cette modernité qu'elle veut incarner et d'une identification croissante avec les classes moyennes, la Hamidiyya a transféré son siège du quartier populaire de Bulaq, où se trouvait la mosquée et la tombe de Sidi Salama ar Radi pour s'établir dans le quartier des nouvelles classes moyennes de Mohandessin.

On the other hand, Mahmūd joined a Sufi order in the countryside, which was thus not urban. It seems then that in his later years, he navigated between an urban reformist form of Sufism and a prereformed Sufism of the countryside. I develop this point further toward the end of the present chapter.

This dissertation deals with the question of knowing how the name of Ibn 'Arabī had been dragged into the French Sufi theopolitical framework. However, if many French readers of Guénon converted to Islam (as understood by Guénon), this also occurred because Guénon's views had approved as "orthodox" by the rector of al-Azhar, Abdal Halim Mahmūd. I have presented above Mahmūd's biography and the reasons that might explain the nature of Mahmūd's fascination with the French Orientalist.

In the following paragraphs, I intend to present Mahmūd's theopolitical views and ask how they are related to the name of Ibn 'Arabī. I first start from the concept of the Perfect Human Being and the law of Islam, as these are the clearest in his philosophy of religion. I then uncover two main differences between Mahmūd and Guénon's philosophies. The first regards their interpretation of Kant and refers to the relation between the authority of Islam and the authority of philosophy. The second touches upon the doctrine that has been ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī throughout history: the unity of being

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[257] Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Le soufisme réformiste: l'exemple de trois confréries," 91.

(*waḥdat al- wūjūd*). Guénon and Mahmūd defend two very different interpretations of this spiritual doctrine.

3.4 MAHMŪD, AL-AL-FĀRĀBĪ, AND THE QUESTION OF THE PERFECT HUMAN BEING (INSAN AL-KAMIL)

Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd uses the expression "the Perfect Human Being"—"Insan al-Kamil"—in a chapter in which he presents al-Fārābī's philosophy. In this chapter, Mahmūd writes:

> Each one of the people is naturally inclined to be in need of something, and therefore needs to be among his tribe [*qawmiḥi*]. And in the moment he speaks with the most gracious words, he is different from the many things that do not have access to language. He cannot carry out [*yaqumu*[258]] on his own the task to find the things he needs to answer his needs. Rather, he needs the tribe as it is, the tribe that will look for the things needed for each one of the tribe, so this is the solution. It is not in this way [by staying lonely] that he will become the *Perfect Human Being* [*Insān al-Kāmil*].
>
> There are three kinds of perfection: the supreme perfection, the wide perfection, the small perfection.
>
> The supreme one: Putting together all the groups belonging to the collective of all those who inhabit the world.
>
> The wide one: To bring together a community among the portions of all those who inhabit the world.

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[258] Here is a play of words with the root q-w-m: "tribe" and "carry out." The emphasis on "perfect human being" is mine.

The small one: Putting together the people/family of a city, the latter being a portion of those who are part of the community. The doctor Ali Abdal Wahid noted that: "This is why al-Fārābī here remembers he who is the first to gather together" [the human community of the whole world]. The first is the one who gathers together all the perfections. No one before him has ever gathered the different collectives before him. He [al-Fārābī] is not here taking his references from the Greek [*yunan*[259]] philosophy as they thought only about what they could see under their eyes: small states that consisted of cities and their satellites. Perhaps this has influenced al-Fārābī in his conceptualization of what religion is, because it is Islam's aim to surrender the world under the governance of the Khalifa; he is the shadow of God on earth.[260]

According to al-Fārābī, the "Perfect Human Being" is the king-philosopher who is "naturally disposed at receiving the intellect agent. His passive intellect reaches its perfection through the apprehension of all the intelligibles, and thus becomes the active intellect."[261] The king-philosopher then does not need any heteronomous relations as, having acquired all the sciences, he rules the virtuous city by the "virtue of his

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[259] "Yunan" is a floating signifier here that names the processes by which Greek philosophy (perceived as a "whole") may offer a knowledge that is antithetic or symmetric to the knowledge offered by the Islamic sciences. For instance, Al Kindi personalizes the imagined whole of Greek philosophy by constructing the tale according to which Yunan and Qahtan (here *the* ancestor of the Arabs) were two brothers and thus Greek philosophers and Arabs can walk together toward the same goal. Fritz W. Zimmerman, "Al-Kindi," in *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbassid Period*, ed. M. J. L. Young, J.
D. Latham, and R. B. Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 364–70.

[260] ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, *Tafkir al Falsafa fī al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arifa, 1989), 250–53, retrieved March 26, 2015, http://abdel-halim.org/Philosphical%20Thinking%20in%20Islam.pdf. Emphasis is mine.

[261] Diane Steigerwald, "La pensée d'Al-Farabi (259/872-339/950): son rapport avec la philosophie ismaélienne," *Langage apophatique* 55, no. 3 (October 1999): 455–76.

thoughts."[262] The laws of Islam as such derive from his thoughts. In line with the Naḥda philosophy, Mahmūd's thus understands the law of Islam from the standpoint of apologetics and rationalist philosophy and identifies the Sufi notion of the Perfect Human Being with al-Fārābī's king-philosopher.

3.5. TWO MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MAHMŪD AND GUÉNON

3.5.1 ON KANT AND SUFISM

But if Mahmūd identifies the king-philosopher with the Sufi concept of the Perfect Human Being (Insan al-Kamil), how does he understand the relation between philosophy and Sufism? How, then, does Mahmūd articulate the relationship between Sufism and philosophy? This is how he legitimizes the idea that philosophy and Sufism belong to the same path:

> The exemplary path for attaining wisdom,
>
> The path of the intellect and the path of Sufism:
>
> Are they two distinct paths?
>
> They are one single path of which they are two distinct phases and two distinct words that express two different perfections. What distinguishes the two paths is that they answer two different kinds of deviations/corruptions/confusions of the man; therefore, it is said that they are two paths.
>
> It is like someone looking for wisdom [Plotinus]: he will look for marvelous, subtle, and very deep words.
>
> He says: "the unveiling [kašf] is from God, therefore one can join God though it."

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[262] Steigerwald, "La pensée d'Al-Farabi (259/872-339/950): son rapport avec la philosophie ismaélienne."

The unveiling is from God through the mediation/instrument of the intellect: reaching a sound indication hinting toward the Truth and a clear proof.

This is: the middle station of the path of perfection: now many people stop here. There are negligent indeed! . . .

Therefore, one can join God through it: this is the path of Sufism; it is the second part of the complete and perfect path. This is indeed the perfect path, as it is called by Ibn Tufayl.[263]

In this passage, it seems that Mahmūd understands Sufism as the perfection beyond the perfection attained by the philosopher who has joined his intellect with the divinity. This point is further strengthened in another writing.

ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd wrote a chapter on al-Ghazali, the famous Sufi known in the Islamic world as the scholar who refuted the creed of the philosophers, and his relation with the Falsafa. In this chapter, Mahmūd argues that there is no difference between Kant[264] and al-Ghazali as both have shown in the same manner the antinomies of ʿaql (this would be reason/*Vernunft* for Kant and intellect/'aql for al-Ghazali), and that beyond the antinomies of the intellect, only an unveiling (*kašf*) can give certainty. 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd writes:

This is the solution that Kant gave for Germany in his book *Pure Reason/Intellect*,[265] a book that tackles the problem of the insufficiencies of reason/intellect of man. He demolishes through this what the members of the

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[263] First Name ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, *Tafkir al Falsafa fil'l Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-M'arifa, 1989), 163-77.

[264] For the diffusion of Kant in the Arab world, see Michael Frey and Aysun Aly, "Kant auf Arabisch: übersetzungsprobleme und deren lösungen durch die übersetzer," *Asiatische Studien* 64, no. 3 (2010): 535-79.

[265] I give here the title as transcribed by ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd.

school of the Intellect have built so far before him. And, the sincerity belongs to his words. Therefore, he is venerated and was a God's blessing [*n'ima*] for his fatherland. Al-Ghazali has saved the Islamic world from being overwhelmed by the doubts to which philosophical thinking could lead and from its arrogance. Al-Ghazali moved in the same direction as Kant but just did it before him. There is no difference between al-Ghazali and Kant, as truly Kant is in accordance with its principles. Concerning al-Ghazali, he was frustrated in his hopes by analytical thinking and oriented himself to the discipline of Sufism. It is through this path that he granted success (or made suitable) the religion of truth by making it independent from the sciences and from the metaphysical philosophy.[266]

We begin to see here the displacement ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd made of the word "unveiling," by pushing the 12th century scholar al-Ghazali into the arms of a modern Kant. ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd sees philosophy as a necessary step for al-Ghazali to go beyond it through Sufism. Sufism, in Mahmūd's eyes, is beyond the intellect once the intellect recognizes its insufficiencies. A spiritual supra-rational truth is reasonable in the sense that both Kant and Ghazali understand its reality. Ghazali becomes, through his proximity with Kant, a well-suited figure inside the quest for modernity by Naḥda scholars, who wished to build a "modern" Egypt similar to a European nation.

Presenting this view of 'Abdal Ḥalīm Mahmūd allows us to capture the difference between his philosophical framework and that of Guénon. For Guénon, Kant is only a symptom of modern philosophy—this is to say, of a philosophy that, because it cannot go

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[266] ʿAbd al-Halīm Mahmūd, *Al Islam wa al-'Aql* (Cairo: Dar al Ma'arifa, 1988), 85. Emphasis is mine. The text is undated but was probably written around 1960, when Mahmūd left philosophy for Sufism.

beyond the mind, impedes itself from intuitively grasping the absolute self-identity of the metaphysical principle.[267] According to Guénon, modern philosophy cannot go beyond the mind because it confuses the theory of knowledge with knowledge itself. We find the following statement about Kant in his books: "This [modern] philosophy substitutes the 'theory of knowledge' to knowledge itself and this shows clearly its incapacity [to reach the pure intellectual knowledge of truth]. Nothing is more representative of this attitude than Kant's philosophy."[268]

In contrast, the kind of Sufism that Mahmūd promotes by bringing together Ghazali and Kant grasps a knowledge that is independent from the sciences and metaphysical philosophy. We thus acknowledge a shift that Mahmūd made in the 1960s, from a view that sees the Perfect Human Being as one that is identical with the king-philosopher to a view that sees Sufism as a knowledge independent from any metaphysical discourse once and only once the latter has rationally recognized its insufficiencies. In which ways is Sufism independent? And what is the content of this special knowledge that the Sufi experiences?

3.5.2 Mahmūd on the Teachings of the Unity of Being (waḥdat al- wūjūd)

The encounter with his Sufi master pushed Mahmūd away from a theoretical and historical study of Sufism into an experienced form of Sufism. He wrote a book on the important figures of the Shadhiliya Sufi path. Until the 1960s, his audience followed him in the act of rewriting Sufism according to the Naḥda agenda—this is to say, by promoting an "elegant" and "intellectual" form of Sufism that was clearly set against a form of

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[267] René Guénon, *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 132.
[268] René Guénon, *Introduction Générale à l'Etude des Doctrines Hindoues* (Paris: Editions Vega, 2009), 152.

Sufism of the countryside and Cairo's poor. Guénon acknowledged a sense of familiarity between his philosophy and the form of Sufism (that he thought of as the only correct form of "Sufism") initiated by those Sufi masters who had implemented the Naḥdist ideas in the social organization of their Sufi order. Nonetheless, Mahmūd's Sufi master was not an urban master and lived in the countryside, which had not been completely touched by the political transformation of Sufism initiated by al-Azhar and the Supreme Sufi Council of Egypt. After his meeting with his Sufi master, Mahmūd began to defend Ibn 'Arabī in front of his audience and admirers. They had followed him out of appreciation for early Sufis but could not believe that the contemporary Sufis were as "orthodox" and "elegant" as the earlier ones.

In his book on the Shadhiliya order that intertwines stories of his personal spiritual experiences with defenses of the "orthodoxy" of the Shadhiliy Sufi order, Mahmūd writes a chapter on the teachings that have been attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, specifically the unity of being, or *waḥdat al- wūjūd*. The main idea that this formula conveys is that only God is real and thus all that is not God is empty of any reality.

There have been then two declinations of this idea: a hermetic and extremist one and a more Islamicized and moderate one. Which one is closer to Guénon's Perennialist ideas? Which one of these two interpretations of the unity of being did Mahmūd defend in his book on the Shadhiliy order?

The Andalusian mystic Ibn Sab'in (d. 669/1270) supported the extremist version and his mystical path was, to his own confession, very similar to al-Al-Fārābī's

philosophy.[269] His school is named the Absolute Unity of Being (*waḥdat al- wūjūd al-muṭlaq*).

Ibn Sab'in's main teaching is that because only God is real, all the rest has no reality at all and thus is ultimately an "illusion."[270] For Ibn Sab'in's disciple, the knowledge of God is achieved by identifying one's existence with God's intellect[271]. In a global presentation of Ibn Sab'in's thoughts, Yousef Casewit writes:

> Like other Hermetists, Ibn Sab'īn proclaimed that the essence of the human Intellect is derived from the Intellectual-Principle. The human Intellect, however, cannot be reduced to the rational faculty and discursive thought. Rather, it is a 'supra-rational' or intuitive organ within man, and, as he says in his discourse, the only faculty which "is capable of grasping the other-worldly realities".[272]

The knowledge given by the divine intellect belongs to an "eternal wisdom" transmitted through the centuries by Hermes Trismegistus. The passage that best describes Ibn Sab'in's hermetic teachings is then the following:

> Far more than Ibn ʿArabī, who in his writings always felt the need to Islamize transcendent truths by grounding them in a Qur'anic epistemology, Ibn Sab'in goes out on a doctrinal limb by taking the concept of wahdat al-wujud literally. . . . Within the All-comprehensive Circle, Monopsychism is revealed through

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[269] Vincent Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle: Soul, Intellect and the Oneness of Existence in the Doctrine of Ibn Sab'in," in *Sufism and Theology,* ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 31-49.

[270] Benjamin G. Cook, "Ibn Sab'in and Islamic Orthodoxy," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 8 (2012): 94-109.

[271] Vincent Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle," 31-49.

[272] Yousef A. Casewit, "The Objective of Metaphysics in Ibn Sab'in's Answers to the Sicilian Questions," *Iqbal Review* 49 (April 2008): 102.

Metaconsciousness. For Ibn Sab'in, the vocalisation or enunciation of this all-encompassing truth can only be in the philosophical-revelatory language of the Hermetic sages.[273]

If this is the main difference between Ibn 'Arabī's and Ibn Sab'in's understanding of the *waḥdat al- wūjūd*, to which of these two mystics does Guénon's understanding of the unity of being come close to? Michel Chodkiewicz, one of the main contemporary experts of Ibn 'Arabī, argues that René Guénon and Ivan Aguéli read and translated a teaching that was wrongfully ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī's school but in reality belonged to that of Ibn Sab'in.[274] When looking for similarities between Guénon's and Ibn Sab'in's philosophies, we find the following correspondences:

a) The universal intellect is the main faculty through which humans can know the first principle. This is best seen by the following statement, in which Guénon argues that consciousness is only a reflection of the universal intellect: "elle est une participation, par réfraction, à la nature de cet intellect universel et transcendant qui est lui-même, finalement et éminemment, la suprême « raison d'être » de toutes choses."[275]

b) Only the being of the first principle is real, while all that is not Him is an "illusion":

C'est là le point de vue de la réalité, car la multiplicité, hors du principe unique, n'a qu'une existence illusoire; mais cette illusion avec le désordre qui lui est inhérent, subsiste pour tout être tant qu'il n'est pas parvenu, d'une façon pleinement effective (et non pas, bien entendu, comme simple conception

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273 Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle," 31-49.

274 Michel Chodkiewicz, forward to Awhad ad-Din Baliyani, *Epitre sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1981).

275 René Guénon, Les Etats Mutilples de l'Etre (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1984), 95.

théorique), à ce point de vue de l'« unicité de l'Existence » (*Wahdatul-wujûd*) dans tous les modes et tous les degrés de la manifestation universelle.[276]

c) Finally, an eternal wisdom exists delivered by, among others, Hermes Trismegistus, and this knowledge is a suprahuman knowledge that is above the canonical traditions[277]:

> En effet, la doctrine ainsi désignée est par là même rapportée à Hermès, en tant que celui-ci était considéré par les Grecs comme identique au Thoth égyptien; ceci présente d'ailleurs cette doctrine comme essentiellement dérivée d'un enseignement sacerdotal, car Thoth, dans son rôle de conservateur et de transmetteur de la tradition, n'est pas autre chose que la représentation même de l'antique sacerdoce égyptien, ou plutôt, pour parler plus exactement, du principe d'inspiration « supra-humaine ».[278]

Contrary to this extremist understanding of the *waḥdat al- wūjūd*, Ibn 'Arabī and most of his pupils throughout the centuries understand it differently. They instead argue that God is the only reality that is but that all that is not God borrows existence from God. In this sense, all that is not God can be perceived as having a slight reality of its own. Synthesizing Ibn 'Arabī's fundamental thoughts, Aladin Bakri writes:

> the established entities . . . have no independent existence, only a non-existent thingness; after appearing in the external world, they remain in their state of non-existence, or as Ibn 'Arabī expresses it, "they have never smelt the breath of

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[276] René Guénon, *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1996), 79.

[277] I examine Guénon's treatment of the figure of Hermes Trismegistus in the chapter on Valsan.

[278] René Guénon, *Apercus sur l'initiation* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1964), 260.

existence" because true "existence" applies to nothing but God, and the possible thing's existence is only a borrowed one.[279]

The knowledge of God is then achieved by meditating on God's speech and on Muslims' liturgical actions through man's immediate five senses, which are "never mistaken," although "the estimative judgments drawn from what the Intellect grasps can be mistaken."[280] Ontological assertions are then derived from these previous meditations on language and law. The other way around would be a philosophical endeavor that is far away from Ibn 'Arabī's perspective. This is well exemplified by Eric Winkel in his groundbreaking article on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fiqh* (Meditations on Islamic Law):

> We do not find a neo-Platonic or Gnostic denigration of the body—in contrast, Ibn 'Arabī's treatment of the fiqh is true to its bodily and "earthy" ground. Ibn 'Arabī does not deal in symbols. Water is a metaphor for knowledge, as we shall see him argue, and the discerning eye will be able to "cross over" from water to knowledge and back again. This crossing over affirms both sides.[281]

In this study, in which Chodkiewicz synthesizes the main differences between Ibn Sab'in and Ibn 'Arabī, he declares that the main contrast lies in their respective understandings of the nature of that which is not God. For Ibn Sab'in's disciples, all that is not Allah is ultimately an illusion, while for Ibn 'Arabī's disciples, this statement "only Allah is real" is imperfect if not completed by its corollary, which states that creation is a

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[279] Aladin Bakri, "The Mystery of Destiny in Ibn 'Arabī and al Qūnawī," *Journal of the Ibn Arabi Society* 40 (2001), retrieved on November 8, 2018, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/mystery-of-destiny.html.

[280] Ali Ghandour, *Die Theologische Erkenntnislehre Ibn al'Arabi's* (Norderstedt: Editio Gryphus, 2018), 180–1. He quotes *Futuhat al-Makiya*, vol. 1, ed. Ahmad Shams ad-Din (Beirut: Dar Kutub al Ilmiya. 2006), 214.

[281] Eric Winkel, "Ibn 'Arabī's Fiqh: Three Cases from the *Futuhat*," *Journal of the Ibn 'Arabī Society* 13 (1993), 54-74.

truthful manifestation of God. In other words, "For Ibn 'Arabī, God is the Being of all that is, while for Ibn Sab'in, God is all that is. . . . For Ibn 'Arabī, God is the 'Light of the heavens and the earth' (Qur'an 23:35) while for Ibn Sab'in, God is the sun without its rays."[282]

Having presented the two different approaches to the teachings of the unity of being, we need to dive into Mahmūd's chapter on the *waḥdat al- wūjūd*. In fact, Mahmūd attempts to show that Ibn 'Arabī Sufism is not an extremist Sufism, such as Ibn Sab'in's, but rather a moderate one.

As Mahmūd knows that his modern and urban readers have many prejudices against speculative Sufism as taught by Ibn 'Arabī, he begins this chapter by letting their interrogations start his exposition: "How can it be that Abu Abbas al-Mursi believed in the unity of being [*waḥdat al- wūjūd*]?; What was the position of his master on this question? Why did someone like Ibn Ata Allah teach this topic?"[283] This is the opening question of this chapter that brings together three of the main figures of the Shadhili path. Abu Abbad al-Mursi (1219-1287) was the closest companion of Abu Hassan Shadhili (1196-1258), founder of one of the main Sufi paths today. Ibn Ata Allah (1260-1309) was the third master of the Shadhili Sufi path. He became famous for his aphorisms, which are still widely read throughout the globe.

Mahmūd's first step is to declare that the unity of being designates the existence of the absolute reality of God, which is not connected to the plurality of the created things. His second step is to say that if there is no connection between God's absolute reality and a created thing, then the perceived veil between God's absolute reality and oneself is only a

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[282] Michel Chodkiewicz, *Epitre sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Location: Publisher, year), 37.
[283] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, *Madrasat ash-Shadhiliya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arifa, 1968), 248.

(wrong) conjecture of the mind. The question that than Mahmūd raises is the following: if there is only the absolute reality of God, how are we to understand the relationship between God and the one who prays to Him?[284]

Mahmūd then unfolds his argumentation by saying that the philosophers of the Greek period (*'ahl al-yunani*) as well as modern ones have stated that the unity of being means that all that is existent has a common existence that is one and is common to the opposites, such as summer and winter or day and night.[285] Nonetheless, Mahmūd departs from any philosophical investigation when he states that the spiritual experience of God's unity, and thus of the unity of being, is one, which, according to Imam Sha'rani (1492– 1565),[286] is not found in the philosophers' books. Mahmūd argues that philosophers do claim that "the essence of what is existent is being itself" (*al-mawjūd huwa 'ayn al-wūjūd*), while Sufis claim that "the existence in and for itself is one" (*wūjūd al-waḥid*).

Mahmūd's interpretation of Sha'rani drifts from a philosophical conception of the unity of being, which Mahmūd judges negatively, to a knowledge of the unity of being, as given by the Sufi's perceptions.

The "philosophers" erase the plurality of all the existent things in the unity of their common essence, which is identical to God's absolute reality. Oppositely, according to Mahmūd, the Sufis, by using the expression "unity of being," refer only to the absolute reality of God and here do not say anything about the characteristics of the reality of the plurality of existent things. Having clarified the difference between philosophers and Sufis,

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[284] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, 248.

[285] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, 249.

[286] Abd al Wahhab al Sha'rani (1492–1565) was an Egyptian Sufi scholar who belonged to the Shahdily Sufi path and defended on several occasions the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī against both the extreme monism of Ibn Sab'in and theologians who held to the idea that Ibn 'Arabī was a disbeliever.

Mahmūd tackles the question of the plurality of existent things and their relationship to God's absolute unicity. Specifically, God holds all things together through His power[287]. Mahmūd writes, "This power [qayyumiya] is related by both the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They do tell us that this power abundantly flows on man so that he starts shaking in a violent way. He then becomes able to unify his perceptions of God's existence in an act of pure worship."[288]

This power acts in such a way that the Sufi, as his goal, directs his intention toward a pure knowledge of God's unicity, "without theosophically unifying ['ittihad] the creator and the created thing." The Sufi enters a state in which he is drowned [istigharaqa] into God's uttmost unity, which leads the Sufi to perceive God's unicity through the power [qayymuiyya] that God has put in him or her.[289] Mahmūd ends this chapter by listing the Sufis who, according to him, share this peculiar interpretation of the unicity of being. We do find Ibn 'Arabī among them, but contrary to the other Sufis mentioned in this list, Mahmūd twice mentions him using the honorific title "our master."

There are two main indications that Mahmūd here is defending an Islamic and moderate understanding of the expression "unity of being."

1) The first is the authority of 'Abd al-Wahhab Sha'rānī, which Mahmūd conveys to distinguish the understanding of this expression by the philosophers from that by the Sufis. Sha'rani defended Ibn 'Arabī against extremist interpretations by Ibn Sab'in's followers. Endo Haruka writes the following in a paper on Sha'rani's defense of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings on the unity of being:

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[287] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, *Madrasat ash-Shadhiliya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 252.
[288] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, *Madrasat ash-Shadhiliya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 248.
[289] Abdal Halim Mahmūd, *Madrasat ash-Shadhiliya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 256-7.

Al-Shaʿrānī was careful enough to distance himself from several groups under the influence of Ibn ʿArabī who, in al-Shaʿrānī's perspective, displayed an extreme idea of divine self-manifestation. One of these groups is "the people of the absolute oneness" [ahl al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa]. The "absolute oneness" was a derogatory expression originally used to denounce the monistic philosophy of Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 668-669/1269-71) of Murcia. Yet it came to imply Ibn ʿArabī's philosophy among his antagonists by the end of the Mamluk period.[290]

Moreover, the group of philosophers that Shar'ani and Mahmūd had in mind likely belonged to Ibn Sab'in's school. Both of them ascribe to the "philosophers" the idea that the essence of all created things is one. In the same manner, Ibn Sab'in's disciples argue that the essence of all things is identical to God's essence.

2) Secondly, Mahmūd follows the idea he has presented in the abovementioned passage in which he brings Kant close to Ghazali, by stating that Sufism is an independent science that does not rely on a metaphysical teaching. Mahmūd states that the experiences of the unity of being are paramount to the Sufi path and are not achieved by the intellect (and thus are incompatible with philosophical thinking) but rather by the perception of the five senses. Abenante has beautifully argued that this form of Sufism—whose affects run through the body as if belonging to a mystical realm beyond the first intellect—is not only despised by European Guenonian Sufis[291] but moreover is central to a form of Sufism practiced in Sudan—this is to say, outside of the area ruled by the Supreme Sufi Council's

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[290] Endo Haruka, "A Preliminary Outlook on al Sharani's Defence of Ibn' Arabi's and the Intellectual Milieu during Early Ottoman Egypt," *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* (March 8, 2015): 4- 25.

[291] Paola Abenante, "Essentializing Difference: Text, Knowledge and Ritual Performance in a Sufi Brotherhood in Italy," *The e-Journal of Economics & Complexity* 2, no. 1 (May 2016), 51-68. See also Paola Abenante, "Misticismo Islamico: Riflessioni Sulle Pratiche di Una Confraternita Contemporanea," *Meridiana* 52 (2005): 65-94.

reformist (and intellectual) Sufism of Egypt.[292] Going into greater detail about Abenante's

marvelous work would definitely lead us astray.

3.5.3 Maḥmūd Congruous with Guénon up to 1960

Guénon and his followers established the theories and practices of Sufism in France

in the twentieth century. Their work theopolitically reframed Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual insights.

This movement's success in France could not have occurred without support from the al-

Azhari scholar 'Abd al-Halīm Maḥmūd. In this chapter, I tackled this general question with

the following interrogation: Why did Mahmud, both personally and intellectually, feel a

sense of kinship with Guénon? Was this the case throughout his life?

Mahmūd's 1960 meeting with a Sufi shaykh transformed his thoughts. Before the

sixties, he promoted an intellectual and—in the words of his mentor 'Abd al-Raziq—

"elegant" Sufism that was compatible with the Naḥda.

After the sixties, Mahmud defended the idea that Sufism was an independent science

that did not necessarily rely on metaphysics. He stated then that Sufism is based on sensory

experience; he also quoted Sha'rani to promote a moderate interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī that

is clearly contradictory to the positions that Ibn Sab'īn defended. Guénon's understanding

of Sufism is close to Ibn Sab'īn's extremist and Hermetic teachings. Both Guénon and Ibn

Sab'iīn argue that God can be known through an intuition that comes from the universal

intellect and that is exposed through metaphysical teaching; both also argue that the plurality

of existent things is ultimately an illusion in front of the first principle.

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[292] Paola Abenante, "Corpi virtuosi e spiriti sensibili: esperienze e immaginari nel sufismo egiziano contemporaneo" (PhD diss., Università Bicocca, 2010), chap. 6 and 8.

Finally, both argue that the universal wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus is the foundation from which Islam is derived.

Mahmūd was convinced that Kant was a great philosopher who could be used to introduce Sufism—independent from any other metaphysical science (that is to say, Hellenic, as in al-Fārābī's commentaries on Aristotle and Plato)—to an Egyptian audience that had studied European philosophy; this contrasts with Guénon's criticism of Kant. Moreover, Mahmūd's later conviction that Sufism does not need to be based on metaphysical teaching also distinguishes his and Guénon's interpretations of Sufism.

Nonetheless, Mahmūd acted as a scholar who had been trained in France, starting from his return to Cairo and lasting until his later days. On a personal level, his meeting with Guénon is interesting because Guénon orientalizes his French identity, whereas Mahmūd gallicizes his Egyptian identity. This may well explain why, after 1960, Mahmūd did not attempt to reconcile the inner contradiction between his allegiance to al- Naḥda and his private teachings on Ibn 'Arabī.

It is no surprise, then, that he continued to support the form of Islam that Guénon's heir, Valsan, constructed in France in the seventies.

In September 1971, Mahmūd and Valsan visited a Sufi house of prayer in Cairo[293]. Moreover, Mahmūd quoted one of Valsan's articles in his own biography of Guénon, thus legitimizing Valsan's construction of the French Sufi doctrine.[294]

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[293] Maurice Le Baot, "Une Visiste de Shaykh Mostafa (Michel Valsan) à la 'Achira Muhammadiya," Le Porteur de Savoir:, https://leporteurdesavoir.fr/une-visite-de-cheikh-mostafa-abd-el- aziz-michel-valsan-a-la-achirah-muhammadiyyah, published on October 25th, 2015.

[294] Michel Valsan, "L'Oeuvre de René Guénon en Orient," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 411 (January/February 1969).

Mahmūd refused to publicly draw strong differences between the Sufism of the urban Sufi Supreme Council and the French Guénonian Islamic converts on the one hand and the teachings that he had received from his Sufi master in rural Egypt on the other hand. This may have been one of the reasons that Mahmūd only taught the non-modern interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings in private meetings. In this sense, he ensured that Valsan's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī would be free of any critique from al-Azhar.

3.6 RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO MAHMŪD'S THEOPOLITICS

As a young PhD student at La Sorbonne in Paris, Mahmūd was very critical of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism. He labeled it as extremist and as foreign to both the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Over the years, he completely changed his mind, and in his last writings, even called Ibn 'Arabī "our master" twice. In his older years, Mahmūd also defended the idea that philosophy as a discipline was required to obtain knowledge hinting at God's reality. However, he saw it as necessarily imperfect and in need of being superseded by a Sufi contemplation of God's power that upholds the existence of creation. When Sufis have sensory experiences of God's power, they feel the unity of the sole being that is God.

4. MICHEL VALSAN AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEO HERMETIC ISLAM

This dissertation deals with the knowledge of the extent to which the twentieth-century establishment of a French Sufi speculative doctrine theopolitically reframed the teachings of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. I ask two questions regarding each of the main authors of this French spiritual and philosophical school: Which European spiritual tradition do they try to connect to Sufism? In which ways did they present their own theopolitical views in Ibn Arabī's name?

In the second chapter, I examined how Guénon reinterprets Sufism by understanding it as both belonging to Islam and overcoming it, in the sense that Islam is tied to devotion to a personal god, whereas Sufism is based on the supreme self-identity of the impersonal first principle, which is beyond all traditions. Guénon perceives traditions such as Islam and Christianity as closed totalities made of structural oppositions that can be overcome only by intellectually revealing the secret self-identity of the first principle. This secret is found inside these closed traditions but is an expression of a universal reality that is beyond them. In the third chapter, I analyzed 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd 's support of Guénon's philosophy. This alliance between Guénon and Mahmūd formed the basis for Valsan's social success; Valsan had more than one thousand close disciples in the sixties—which is a large number, even for an Arab country.[295]

Guénon describes an ambiguity concerning the identity of the final or eschatological tradition; is it Islam, is it Freemasonry, or is it a Freemason metaphysics that is expressed using Islamic language? For instance, Guénon writes, "There exists a symbolic interpretation of the Arabic letters that form the name *Allah* and that is purely Masonic."[296]

This is why scholars speak of a rivalry among Guénon's successors: those who think that Guénon was mainly a Freemason living in an Islamic country versus those who think that he was mainly a Muslim who tried to convey an Islamic message to Freemasons. Valsan clearly sides with the second group. However, to do so, he had to include Freemasonry in Islam. In fact, he argued that Freemasonry cannot reach its spiritual goal

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[295] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.
[296] René Guénon, "Notes and Queries," *The Speculative Mason* , no. 27 (July 1935): 118-119.

without the support of the Islamic elite (who would fully understand its Freemason language and who therefore cannot be identified with anyone other than Valsan himself).

I prove in the following pages that Valsan uses Hermeticism to include Freemason readers under his personal authority. Then, to examine Valsan's theopolitical views, I analyze his translation of a short epistle written by Qūnawī, Ibn 'Arabī's immediate heir. By tracing the places where Valsan shifts the original meanings of Qūnawī's text to fit in a French Perennialist framework, I access Valsan's effective theopolitical framework.

4.1 Who Was Michel Valsan?

Michel Valsan (1911-1974) is, together with Henry Corbin, the scholar who is responsible for introducing Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) to the broad French public in modern times. Valsan understood that his esoteric function was to reconcile the teachings of the French thinker René Guénon (1886-1951) with those of Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240).

In his youth in his native Romania, Valsan read Guénon closely. During these years, he approached the mystic Petrache Lupu (1907-1994)—who some Romanian intellectuals and scholars considered to possess a link to the primordial tradition, and who many peasants and members of the army saw as a saint who could return Romania to its past glory.

Later in his life, Valsan found Islam at Frithjof Schuon's Sufi tariqa in Lausanne, Switzerland. Schuon (1907-1998) was the first person to establish a Sufi Tariqa based on Guénon's guidelines. Over time, Schuon distanced himself from Guénon and from his original attachment to the Algerian Shadhiliya 'Alawiya Tariqa.

After some years, Valsan's distanced himself from Schuon and accused the latter of neglecting the dictates of Sharīʿah with regard to fasting during the month of Ramadan.

In a later period, Valsan constructed a hermeneutical apparatus that brought together Guénon and Ibn 'Arabī, while also writing on non-Islamic matters (such as Freemasonry, Joan of Arc, and Hesychasm).

In the final stage of his life, Valsan[297] focused mainly on Islamic Sufism and showed less interest in other religions. He brought to his Parisian Sufi lodge the rituals of the Shadhiliya order from Tunisia and took frequent trips to Algeria and Egypt, which may have influenced his progressive departure from fin de siècle occultism.

Valsan had access to the headquarters of the Grande Mosquée de Paris,[298] and some of his disciples even taught Islam to converts. In his book *Traité Moderne de Théologie Islamique*, the rector of the Grande Mosquée de Paris, Hamza Boubakeur, heavily criticizes Perennialism and argues that it is un-Islamic and syncretistic. He writes of the Sufi tariqa 'Alawya:

> It is a heteroclite order with a tendency to syncretism. One may find here a confused heap of Muslim, Christian and Hindu ideas in favour or an existentialist monism   This path had and still has a certain success in Europe
>
> where circles animated in France by Abd-l-Karim Jossot and René Guénon and in Switzerland by Frithjof Schuon make a lot of mess to achieve the dull

[297] David Bisson, *René Guénon, Une politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions Pierre Guillaume De Roux, 2013), 357-363.

[298] The Grande Mosquée de Paris is not merely a mosque. It is also a social, political, and cultural institution that (since colonial times) has sought to enact the French government's goal of promoting a "French Islam." For further information, see Ricarda Stegmann, "Zwischen Algerien und Frankreich: Postkoloniale Rezeptionslinien an der Großen Moschee von Paris" (PhD thesis, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2015).

syncretism that Ben 'Alliwa initiated and that as any illusion is, a priori, destined to be a deception.[299]

Boubakeur was, at least publicly, in line with reformist Islam. Nevertheless, because of the many converts who came to the Grande Mosquée as a result of Valsan and Guénon's articles and books, a Perennialist interpretation of Sufism became common in that institution. Today, the Grande Mosquée is divided into two schools: one that is rationalist-reformist one and one that is Guénonian.[300] As Valsan did not officially name a successor, the shaykh of Tunisia decided that Valsan's son Muhammad should be the leader of his father's disciples.

4.2 WHAT WERE VALSAN'S TEACHINGS?

According to the theopolitical device that Valsan established, Guénon is the final embodiment of the divine intellect, which acts as the central axis around which each tradition is established. Valsan understands Islam as being the bearer of this final tradition, which encompasses all the perfect aspects of non-Islamic traditions without abrogating their salvific validities (which might well be Valsan's difference from mainstream Sunni Islam).

In this work, Islam is synonymous with Valsan's construction regarding what Ibn 'Arabī's name should (in his view) designate. Guénon is identified as being an instance of the divine intellect, whereas Ibn 'Arabī is identified as having a complete interpretation of the universal spirit. For instance, Valsan writes concerning Guénon's teachings: "The

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[299] Hamza Boubakeur, *Traité Moderne de Théologie Islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), 481-482.
[300] Ricarda Stegmann, "Zwischen Algerien und Frankreich: Postkoloniale Rezeptionslinien an der Großen Moschee von Paris" (PhD thesis, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2015).

beauty and the majesty and the perfection of this monument of the Universal Intellect . . . is the most wonderful miracle that has happened in these modern times."[301]

When he presented Ibn 'Arabī to an audience that was largely composed of Freemasons, Valsan focused on the mystical relationship that he believed existed between Ibn 'Arabī and the metaphysical existence of the Prophet Muhammad, which Valsan defined as follows: "This is the Prophet considered here as being the primordial reality of the Universal Spirit and of the existentiated Logos living in the Centre of the world." Regarding Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual function, Valsan wrote, *"Shaykh al-Akbar is himself the seal of Muhammadan sainthood."*[302]

My aims in the following pages are to describe the theopolitical device that is at work in Valsan's doctrine and to show how it relates to Ibn 'Arabī's name.

Valsan describes the doctrines of Islam by constructing meaning that is attributed to the name *Ibn 'Arabī*. Moreover, Valsan presents himself as a Sufi shaykh who speaks on behalf of both Islam and a universal truth that is beyond all existing formal traditions, including Islam. Constructing this identity as someone who knows this supra-formal truth allows Valsan to define what Judaism and Christianity ought to be. Valsan was one of the few twentieth-century scholars in Europe or the United States to navigate between two "regimes of truths": one that fits the historical construction of Sharīʿah and one that represents a supra-formal truth. A good example of Valsan's attempt to construct a public

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[301] Michel Valsan, "La Fonction de René Guénon et le Sort de l'Occident," special issue, *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 293-2934-295 (1951). Republished on the Science Sacrée website, accessed March 21, 2016, http://www.sciencesacree.com/pages/recueil-des-ecrits-de-michel-valsan-actuellement-mis-en-ligne.html.

[302] Ibn 'Arabī "al-Futûhât al-Makkiyah, Khutbat al-Kitâb," trans. Michel Valsan, *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 311 (October/November 1953): 300-302.

identity combining these two regimes of truth is best shown in an article that he published in *Etudes Traditionnelles* in the early seventies.

In 1969, Valsan published a letter that a rector of the Islamic College of Karachi had written; in the letter, the author explains how Guénon's works are now taught in Pakistani universities. It is interesting to note that, by trying to show how Guénon's universalist views were already present in the Islamic literature of South Asia, Hassan Askari mingles very different theopolitical perspectives.[303] For instance, he writes that "The prince Dara Shikuh (1615-1650), son of the Emperor Shah Djahan established a correspondance between the esoteric Hindu terms and the Islamic terms"[304]; he continues shortly thereafter, " Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) acknowledged the validy of the doctrine of the Vedas. He only doubted that Hinduism could offer in his century an effective initiatic path"[305]. These are entirely different perspectives. Dara Shikoh (1615- 1650)[306] tried to establish a political coexistence between Muslims and the various groups who are tied to the books of the Vedas based on their shared metaphysical teaching. Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624)[307] actively promoted the statute of dhimmi for the groups who practiced the teachings of the Vedas; his metaphysics are the basis of his own political views. The construction of a Guénonian Islam that erases the battles around the legacies of Shikoh and Sirhindi must be situated in the inner debates of Pakistan. After 1947,

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[303] Valsan, "L'œuvre de René Guénon en Orient," 32-7.

[304] "le prince Dârâ Shikûh, fils de l'Empereur Shah Djahân a déjà préparé une correspondance entre les termes ésotériques hindous et les termes islamiques"

[305] "Le Cheikh Ahmed Sirhindî lui-même a reconnu la validité des doctrines védiques. Ce dont il doute ce sont les possibilités de réalisation offertes par l'Hindouisme actuel."

[306] Tahir Kamran, "Islam, Urdu and Hindu as the Other, Instruments of Cultural Homogeneity in Pakistan," in *Composite Culture in a Multicultural Society*, ed. Bipan Chandra and Sucheta Mahajan (Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2007), 93-123.

[307] Yohanan Friedmann, "Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, June 1966), 121.

intellectuals from Pakistan engaged in discussions regarding which kind of political ideological hegemony should constitute the new Islamic Pakistan.[308] Should it be more inclusive of all minorities, as exemplified in the writing of Dara Shikoh, or is it instead a universal that privileges a group of believers above others, as exemplified in the work of Sirhindi? This was never a question for Guénon, of course, but this debate haunted the Muslim readers who actively corresponded with Valsan. By publishing this letter by Askari, Valsan constructed his public image as an Islamic authority who was known throughout the Muslim world as the representative of the universal truth, as embodied by Guénon.

To understand the construction of the theopolitical device that Valsan created, I must analyze the European spiritual traditions upon which he relies. Defining each group enables him to construct a universal. To be affirmed, this universal must erase the very discursive process through which it was created so that it can become the kind of universal that Valsan wanted to promote. In Valsan's case, constructing a new kind of universal that includes both French Christian and Arabic Islamic grammars meant the following: (a) fixing the Arabic-to-French translation processes and therefore controlling the shifts in meaning that occur when translating and (b) writing in a language that his audience would understand. Starting in 1945, his audience was mainly composed of Freemason readers of Guénon's works; from the sixties onward, his audience also included young hippie people who were on a quest to the mystical East.

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[308] Arthur Buehler, "Ahmad Sirhindi: Nationalist Hero, Good Sufi, or Bad Sufi?," in *South Asian Sufis and Devotion, Deviation and Destiny*, ed. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (London: Continuum International, 2012), 141-62.

All the articles quoted below are from the journal *Etudes Traditionnelles*. This journal first appeared in 1936; it published articles about Guénon and his work. Its audience mainly consisted of Freemasons who were interested in the metaphysical aspects of their rituals, as well as Guénon scholars who share the common principles of his epistemology. Valsan became the director of this journal in 1961 and held this position until his death.

4.3 HOW HAVE SCHOLARS INVESTIGATED VALSAN'S WRITINGS?

To my knowledge, Valsan's works have not previously been studied from an academic point of view. Most of the French Sufi esoteric circles that were connected to both Guénon's legacy and the Islamic spiritualities that relate to interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings felt the need to take a position on Valsan's doctrinal synthesis. From the 1970s through the start of the twenty-first century, this synthesis was not questioned. Charles André Gilis (b. 1934) may well be the best-known author of this group of esoteric scholars; he presented Ibn 'Arabī, Guénon, and Valsan as having experienced three divine epiphanies. He understands Guénon as the manifestation of the divine intellect; Ibn 'Arabī as the perfect synthesis of the Islamic tradition, which he perceives as being the final tradition of the end of times; and Valsan as the judge who connects Islamic Sharīʿah with Adamite wisdom and who thus judges the present era, which precedes the eschatological times.[309]

Furthermore, there was a crisis regarding the conceptual compatibility between Ibn 'Arabī's notions and Guénon's teachings in Sufi Guénonian circles. In 1989, Michel

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[309] Charles-André Gilis, *L'héritage Doctrinal de Michel Valsan* (Paris: Le Turban Noir, 2009).

Chodkiewicz, in a foreword to a translation of a book,[310] argued that the text Guénon identified as belonging to Ibn 'Arabī in fact belonged to the school of Ibn Sab'in (1216-1271).[311] Ibn Sab'in can be understood as a Hermetic philosopher. He accepts Hermes as a central figure in esoteric philosophy and values the centrality of the intellect as a main companion to the Sufi spiritual realization. In 2012, an Italian Sufi Perennialist scholar, Marco Marino, constructed a long argument to defend the idea that Chodkiewicz's discovery did not alter the compatibility between the teachings of Guénon and Ibn 'Arabī.[312] Nonetheless, the length of that article indicates that the question has, in the years since 2000, become complex, as well as that no short answers can resolve this issue. Later, another Italian Perennialist and Shi'a scholar published a short book in which he heavily criticized Marino and asserted that the compatibility of Guénon's and Ibn 'Arabī's teachings is a fact that no amount of critical thinking can disprove.[313] Moreover, in 2014, Eric Geoffroy[314] published a commentary on some poems by the Algerian Sufi Shaykh Aḥmad al-Alawi (1869-1934), whom Guénon used to direct some of his readers to follow. In this commentary, Geoffroy explicitly states that Ibn Sab'in's Hermetic Sufism may have had a stronger influence on al-Alawi than Ibn 'Arabi's teachings.

4.3 Michel Valsan's Construction of a Neo-Hermetic Islam

4.3.1 Valsan and Modern Hermeticism

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[310] Michel Chodkiewicz, introduction to *Epitre sur l'Unicité Absolue*, by Awhad ad-Din Baliyani (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1981).

[311] Cornell, "The Doctrine of Ibn Sab'in," 31-42; Yousef A. Casewit, "The Objective of Metaphysics in Ibn Sab'in's Answers to the Sicilian Questions," *Iqbal Review* 49, 2 (April 2008): 1-6.

[312] Marco Marino, "Il Problema del Wujud tra Guénon e Ibn 'Arabī: Essere o Esistenza?" *Perennia Verba* 12 (2012), 123-257.

[313] Carlo Corbacci, *René Guénon e Ibn 'Arabī* (San Demetrio Corone: Irfan Edizioni, 2014).

[314] Eric Geoffroy, *Un Eblouissement sans Fin* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 280-283.

Vincent Cornell defines *Hermeticism* in an Islamic context as a discourse that follows seven criteria[315]:

    a. A conception of higher philosophy as a form of revelation

    b. A primordial wisdom that includes Egyptian sages such as Hermes and pre-Socratic mystical philosophers such as Pythagoras and Empedocles

    c. An illuminationist mysticism that uses light as a metaphor for revelation

    d. A legitimation of the occult and an openness to theurgy and other "sciences" based on the concept of universal sympathy

    e. An elite interconfessionalism in which terminology and mystical constructs are shared across religious boundaries

    f. A Hermetic "third way" that involves a critique of both peripatetic philosophy and alternative epistemologies (such as gnosticism) and Sufism

    g. A Hermetic "third way" with an eclectic mystical philosophy that draws heavily upon Neoplatonism and neo-Pythagoreanism, whose main doctrinal focuses are on the centrality of the intellect to existence

Valsan's metaphysics correspond broadly to each of these points, but of course his work occurred in a different historical context than the one that Cornell analyzed.

Considering the history of Hermetic philosophy, the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century indicates a sudden transformation. In the nineteenth century, Hermeticism was designated as a quest to give meaning to non-Christian texts by discussing a list of mediations that might lead to the knowledge of Hermes Trismegistus.

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[315] Vincent Cornell, "The All-Comprehensive Circle: Soul, Intellect and the Oneness of Existence in the Doctrine of Ibn Sab'in," in *Sufism and Theology,* ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 31-49.

In the twentieth century, this tradition became a quest for a systematic Hermeticism that was less focused on understanding Hermes than on assembling a heteroclite collection of texts. Florian Ebeling perfectly summarized the need for a system when writing about Julius Evola, a fascist intellectual who was close to Guénon:

> Evola does not just develop his critique of civilization along the lines of the utopian ideal of an alleged Hermetic tradition; he understands himself as part of this tradition whose renaissance he wishes to effect. He does not argue in order to convince; his book is intended only for those who are ready to be guided by it. His own writing is an initiation into the secret of Hermeticism. For his followers, his writings are unquestionable.[316]

This search for a Hermetic system is found in Valsan's edition of Guénon's articles on sacred symbols. Valsan presented his own interpretation of Guénon's teachings by ordering Guénon's article in a succession that was decided by none other than Valsan himself. Valsan opens this book with a treatment of the "science of symbols" related to the paper "Reform of Modern Mentalities." Guénon writes:

> Symbolism is the means best adapted to the teachings of higher religious and metaphysical truths, that is, of all that the modern mind spurns or neglects. Symbolism is entirely contrary to rationalism, and all its adversaries behave, some without even being aware of it, as true rationalists. For our part, we think that if symbolism is not understood today, this is one more reason to insist upon It, expounding as completely as possible the real significance of traditional

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[316] Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 138. German edition: Florian Ebeling, *Das Geheimnis des Hermes Trismegistos* (München: Beck, 2005), 182.

symbols by restoring to them all their intellectual meaning instead of making them simply a theme of sentimental exhortations—for which, moreover, the use of symbolism is quite pointless.[317]

In foreword to this book, Valsan states that the way he ordered Guénon's articles in this book on Guénon's symbology offers a mystical pattern that should quickly introduce the reader to the esoteric totality of which Guénon is the spokesman. In his introduction, Valsan declares that the reader should access "in an instant the whole totality of Guénon's intellectual wisdom"[318] *This is the modern character of Guénon and Valsan's Hermeticism: a quest for a sudden leap into the closed totality of the occult realm*. This quest is, furthermore, a conversion to a spiritual doctrine; after this conversion, the reader becomes a spokesperson for its alleged universal truth. In other words, the modernity of this form of Hermeticism lies in the sudden transformation of the ideal reader into a militant follower of the universal truth that is supposedly present in Guénon's articles.

4.3.2 MODERN HERMETICISM AND THE NAME IBN 'ARABĪ

To construct this neo-Hermetic Islam, Valsan points out the following features that, in his eyes, define the signifier *Islam*. He does this by establishing a language that is distinct from that of both mainstream Sunni scholars and what he characterizes as the modern West[319]:

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[317] René Guénon, *Symboles de la Science Sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 2-7.

[318] Michel Valsan, "Introduction aux Symboles Fondamentaux de la Science Sacrée," Science Sacrée, accessed December 30, 2018, http://www.sciencesacree.com/medias/files/5.-introduction-aux-symboles-fondamentaux-de-la-science-sacree-michel-valsan-n-special-rene-guenon-de-la-revue-science-sacree-2003-.pdf. This introduction is not in the later editions of the book: "d'un seul coup la totalité d'un trésor intellectuel d'une exceptionnelle richesse."

[319] All the following quotations are taken from Valsan, "L'Islam et la Fonction de René Guénon," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 305 (January/February 1953): 14-47.

- In Islam, intellect is rarely seen as a faculty through which one may access the truth of the divine self; *still,* intellect and heart ought to be seen as identical— or, to be more precise, Guénon's teaching about the centrality of the intellect (i.e., the faculty through which individuals overcome the illusion of individuality) can be found in the texts in which Ibn 'Arabī deals with the relationship between the heart and the intellect. Valsan writes,

> The regular doctrine of Islam does not see the Intellect as a divine 'quality' or 'faculty'...The Muhammadan doctrine teaches that it is the heart that is the organe through which man intuitively knows God[320].

- *Even if* most Muslim scholars consider Islam to have abrogated all previous traditions, Valsan states that it is important to understand that, in reality, the Islam of Ibn Arabī accepts the simultaneous salvific validity of all existing traditions. Valsan, speaking of the salvific validity (or lack thereof) that Islam attributes to other religions, writes,

> The dominant exoteric interpretations of these Qur'anic verses sees the validity of other religions only in succession (one new religion abrogates the previous one) not simultaneously (Islam validates those religions that exist in its same period). *Nonetheless*, the Qur'anic text affirms that the Muhammadan revelation gives a "confirmation" of those previous revelations that are still present.

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[320] La doctrine régulière de l'Islam ne considère pas l'Intellect comme une 'qualité' ou 'faculté' divine........Quant à la doctrine Muhammadienne, elle rétablit à cet égard les choses, dans une autre perspective spécifiquement différente: c'est le Cœur qui est la faculté ou l'organe de connaissance intuitive. . . ..

- Sharīʿah is total; this means not only that it encompasses all aspects of life but also that any teaching found in a chosen tradition can also be found in the Islamic tradition and can therefore be translated into its language

- Valsan's Islam is a continuation of the secret conversations and esoteric exchanges between the Templars and certain Sufis in the Middle Ages. Valsan's Hermetic Islam is the most eschatological religion possible. Valsan writes the following regarding the Egyptian Sufi masters who taught Aguéli about the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī: "It seems that the Shaykh Elish had a knowledge of the situation of Freemasonry and of its symbolism."

- In the Sunni Islamic tradition, it is difficult to find a narrative according to which a violent ritual act of sacrifice of primordial man establishes the plurality of manifested things in this world; *still,* all the parts of this scenario are found (in scattered places) within Ibn Arabī's teachings. Valsan writes about a text in which Ibn 'Arabī described the ways in which an accomplished saint goes back to creation: "Shaykh al-Akbar does not show in a clear way the aspect of the 'sacrificial victim' of his mission."[321]

Ibn Arabī is linked to Valsan's modern interpretation of Hermeticism because his name empowers the expression "even if." For instance, *even if* Sunni scholars believe that Islam has abrogated all previous religions, Ibn 'Arabī (as Valsan understands him) does not teach this. *In this sense, the expression "even if" builds an esoteric meta layer over the construction of an exoteric Islam that is both modern and Hermetic. The expression "even if" then allows Valsan's disciple to immediately jump from what he feels being the exoteric*

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[321] Michel Valsan, "Un Texte de Shaykh al-Akbar sur la Réalisation Descendante," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 307 (April/May 1953): 120-27.

form of Islam to the esoteric meta-layer that Valsan has built; which is a subjective expression of the modern hermetic closed totality of the occult realm that I have presented above.

4.3.3 CONNECTING THE PROPHET IDRIS TO FREEMASONRY

I explained above why Valsan feels the need to construct a neo-Hermetic Islam. I now show how he did this precisely to address a Christian Freemason audience. According to Valsan, an incomplete religious form (i.e. that knows only the difference between the divine self and the sensible world) has no direct access to the higher mystery (i.e., the realization that the divine self is identical with all its emanations). Any religious form that is incomplete must be supervised by a second one that is complete. A complete form is directly linked to a universal, hidden center that rules all existing religious and traditions but that is located beyond them. This center belongs to the primordial tradition and thus to Adam's knowledge of the divinity. An incomplete form and a complete form can connect, Valsan says, in many ways. There might not even be a continuous historical connection between them. *Still,* an incomplete religious form does not have the capacity to endure for many centuries without some type of support from a complete form. That is why an actual connection is assumed to be at work between a complete form and an incomplete one, even if there is no material evidence of such a connection. Valsan writes, "There might be small traditional forms They tend normally to follow, not directly the supreme center,

but an intermediate center. The intermediate center becomes then for these smaller forms a hypostasis of the supreme center."[322]

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[322] Michel Valsan, "Les Derniers Hauts Grades de l'Ecossisme," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 308 (June 1953): 161nn2-3: "Il peut y avoir des formes traditionnelles réduites . . . Elles se rangent normalement dans la dépendance, non pas du centre suprême, mais d'un centre intermédiaire plus complet . . .. Un tel

The hierarchy of these centers—the supreme, the intermediate, and the particular—could provide a clue about how Valsan organizes his worldview (i.e., how the hierarchy of authorities that he has in mind distribute power to various figures within his discourse). What kinds of people belong to the supreme, intermediate, and particular centers?

In the article "La Fonction de René Guénon et le Sort de l'Occident,"[323] Valsan mentions Christian Hermeticism as an authentic tradition and reveals that Guénon wished for it to flower again. A few lines later, however, Valsan declares that, since Guénon's death, this movement has not regained its vitality. Later in the same article, Valsan notes that the West seems to have only one major way of identifying political and metaphysical completeness—and that this way may reside in Freemasonry. However, Freemasonry has no normal exoteric tradition upon which esoteric work can be built. Valsan writes, "The relations between Rome and Freemasonry being what they are, Masons have no other choice to look for Christian Orthodoxy or Islam." The normal exoteric tradition should thus be the Catholic Church; however, that church refuses to recognize Freemasonry as an authentic tradition, so Freemasons can only rely on Islam.[324]

Is Freemasonry a complete or incomplete tradition? If it is incomplete, how is it esoterically related to Islam, in Valsan's views? According to Valsan, Freemasonry is an incomplete tradition. He lists three main reasons for this.[325]

1) The most perfect grades of Freemasonry, at least inside the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, are the Inquisitor, the Prince and the Sovereign.

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centre intermédiaire constitue alors, par rapport aux centres particuliers de ce groupe traditionnel, une hypostase du centre suprême."

[323] Valsan, "La Fonction," 14-47.
[324] Valsan, "La Fonction," footnote 31.
[325] Valsan, "Les Hauts Grades," 161-83.

According to Valsan, these functions are not identical to the three metaphysical higher functions of Hinduism (which Guénon states is the closest tradition to the primordial one): "mahângâ," "mahâtmâ," and "brahâtmâ." Here, Guénon heavily relies on fin de siècle occultists such as Saint-Yves (1842-1909) and Ossendowski (1876-1945) to define these three functions as the highest possible in the government of the cosmos. Guénon synthesized these views in his book on the king of the world.[326] Brahâtmâ represents a self that is above the distinction between manifestation and nonmanifestation. Mahângâ represents an authority that rules over the intermediate space between metaphysical ideas and the material world. Finally, Mahâtmâ represents a royal authority that rules over the material world. Valsan sees the same divisions at work in the Sufi doctrine of the pole and two imams.[327] In his view, the pole represents the divine self, the imam of the right represents the intermediate world, and the imam of the left represents the material world.

2) That being said, according to Valsan, Freemasonry completely lacks a supreme function such as the brahâtmâ. The Masonic inquisitor is lower than the mahâtmâ or the imam of the left, and the Masonic sovereign is lower than the brahâtmâ. In other words, according to Valsan, the three Masonic imperfect, incomplete supreme functions end where two other perfect, complete traditions

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[326] René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

[327] For Ibn 'Arabī, as for his successors, the spirit unfolds its hidden reality in four fundamental functions that correspond to the four corners of the Kaab'a. The first corner corresponds to the pole, the second (to the right) corresponds to the imam who controls the intermediate world between ideas and matter, the third (to the left) corresponds to the imam who rules over the world of matter. The fourth position corresponds to the one who will follow the imam of the left after his departure. See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 119.

(Hinduism as the primordial tradition and Islam as the eschatological tradition) begin.

3) The third reason is that the Masonic sovereign bases the invocation on something that is outside of and above the sovereign's domain. According to Valsan, the sovereign looks up to the mahângâ (the ruler of the intermediate world). Indeed, Valsan reports a masonic invocation: "May the Holy-Enoch of Israel and the very holy and very mighty God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob enrich us with his benedictions, now and forever." In line with previous Muslim scholars, Valsan identifies Enoch with the Qur'anic prophet Idris. According to Ibn 'Arabī, Idris rules over the intermediate world. Valsan sees him as identical to the mahângâ. However, in Valsan's view, the Freemason does not know who confers spiritual authority to Idris or the Mahângâ. According to Ibn Arabī's interpretation of the cosmological Muhammadan reality, Idris is a prophet under the authority of Muhammad and is, like all other prophets, an emanation of the Muhammadan universal spirit that (according to Valsan) Ibn 'Arabī knew in its entirety.

These three points are well-illustrated in the following quotation:

On constate ainsi que l'autorité spirituelle qui préside aux travaux du Suprême Conseil Ecossais est le même prophète vivant que l'Islam appelle Idrîs, et que nous avons vu mentionné dans le quaternaire des fonctions qui figurent la hiérarchie suprême du Centre du monde. . . ..Disons maintenant que le Cheikh al-Akbar désigne encore quelquefois ce rasûl de l'épithète de « Pôle des esprits humain « (cf. Futûhât, ch. 198, s. 24; cf. s. 31) et d'autre-part qu'il qualifie le

maqâm spirituel qui lui correspond de maqârn qutbî (« polaire ») (cf. Tarjumânu-l-achwâq, 2); or de tels qualificatifs il ne les emploie pour aucun des prophètes qui, « vivants » ou « morts », président aux autres cieux planétaires, quoique chacun de ceux-ci soit le « Pôle » du ciel correspondant. Il en résulte que, malgré les assimilations et les rapports de parenté étroite que nous avons signalés entre les quatre prophètes vivants, c'est Idrîs qui, parmi ceux-ci, peut être considéré, comme étant le Pôle, et cela a son intérêt quand on veut se rendre mieux compte du rapport de ce même prophète avec les travaux du Suprême Conseil de la Maçonnerie Ecossaise.[328]

The preceding passage details the classical idea that all prophets are partial emanations of Muhammad's universal spirit.[329] Nevertheless, in it, Valsan refashions this belief by putting it in a context that is foreign to classical Islam: the hierarchy of Freemasonry. In other words, Valsan establishes an esoteric meta level of truth over what he labels as exoteric Islam. He does this using the expression "even if." Then, he constructs another esoteric meta level of truth regarding the spiritual hierarchy of Freemasonry by identifying Enoch with Idris, who is a spiritual emanation of Muhammad's universal spirit.

4.3.4 Constructing a Shared Identity for Idris, Enoch, and Hermes

Before presenting Valsan's views on Hermeticism, I must first consider Guénon's writings. Indeed, when Valsan tackles this question, he seeks to provide only very limited comments on what Guénon himself wrote regarding this topic. According to Guénon, Hermes is linked to the ruling of the intermediate world because (a) he is the prophet of alchemy, a science that is between the metaphysical sciences and the natural ones; (b) he is

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[328] Valsan, "Les Hauts Grades," 161-83.
[329] Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 40.

the one who interprets the words of the gods and therefore is not their equal; and (c) he has to be identified with Enoch and (especially) with the Qur'anic Prophet Idris. Guénon writes:

> In the Islamic tradition, Seydina Idris, Hermes and Enoch are identical. This double assimilation of Idris to Hermes and Enoch shows the continuity of a tradition that has its source beyond the Egyptian priests...The hermetic sciences ascribed to Idris are not purely spiritual as are those ascribed to Jesus. The hermetic sciences, such as astrology and alchemy are in fact intermediary sciences.[330]

Valsan added to Guénon's considerations that the intermediary presence of Idris is closely linked to Ibn 'Arabī—who, remember, acts here as a floating signifier who is emptied of his historical successors' epistemology, and who precisely represents the exact kind of neo-Hermetic Islam that Valsan is constructing:

> It is remarkable that the Prophets that Shaykh al-Akbar mentions are the Poles of 6 of the 7 heavens. . . . The only Celestial Pole that is not mentioned is Idris. This cannot be explained otherwise than by saying that it is precisely to this Prophet that Ibn 'Arabī was speaking to.[331]

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[330] René Guénon, *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980): chap. "Hermès."

[331] Muhyî-d-Dîn Ibn Arabî, "al-Futûhât al-Makkiyah," 300-302, n49: "Il est à remarquer que les Prophètes que le Cheikh al-Akbar vient de désigner sont les Pôles de 6 d'entre les 7 Cieux, respectivement: Adam pour le 1er Ciel (Lune); Abraham pour le 7e (Saturne); Jésus pour le 2e (Mercure), Joseph pour le 3e (Vénus); Aaron pour le 5e (Mars; Moïse pour le 6e (Jupiter). Or le seul Pôle céleste qui n'est pas mentionné dans cette série est celui du 4e Ciel (Soleil) qui est Idrîs. La chose ne peut s'expliquer autrement que par le fait que c'est à ce Pôle même que le Cheikh al-Akbar parlait. En effet la position d'Idrîs étant centrale par rapport à l'ordre total, c'est ce prophète particulier qui représente plus directement le Prophète universel résidant au centre du monde."

Why do Guénon and Valsan not clearly identify Freemasonry and Hermeticism as such, and why do they try to draw a distinction between them without ever clearly saying what this distinction is? The most obvious answer is that Hermeticism has rarely constituted itself in a set of practices in the same manner that Freemasonry has done. Furthermore, the answer must relate to the various esoteric meta levels that Valsan had in mind.

Hermeticism (under the authority of Hermes) is a "Western tradition", according to Valsan. This affirmation occurs in an article in which Valsan quotes Guénon as saying that Hermetic Christianity has the potential to reestablish the norm of the universal tradition in Europe.[332] In fact, Valsan provides the first articulation of a connection between the signifiers *autochthonous* and *Hermeticism*:

> We would like to speak of those environments in which live those people that have not received directly a specific religious form given by the founders of the traditional forms (as Christianity and Islam), the Gentiles and the non- Arabs, for whom *Hermeticism was autochthonous*, at least in the Mediterranean region. It seems that the persistence of this tradition and its function in the chivalry orders was able to establish a connection with the Middle-East. This might well be explained by its intellectual dimension that gave its *neutral character and its relative universality* in the Mediterranean environment. Another reason can be found in the natural limitations that the specific values of Jewish or Arab origin met in the people of other races. The situation of "Hermeticism" can therefore be compared to the functions

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[332] Valsan, "La Fonction de René Guénon et le Sort de l'Occident": "si l'on met à part les cas de la survivance possible de quelques rares groupements d'hermétisme chrétien."

Aristoteles and Neoplatonist philosophies have received in this region. It is then no surprise, that Hermeticism has been often associated to these philosophies. Another "minority" that we could quote here is the Judaism of the diaspora. *The Kabbalah tells us that the "Shekina" is among the Gentiles.*[333]

According to Valsan, Hermeticism is an expression of the universal because it is present in many traditions and thus can easily be adapted to a Christian, Jewish, or even an Islamic way of thinking. It is autochthonous in Europe.

On the other hand, Freemasonry is an expression of a certain kind of universal; the best proof for this universal, according to Valsan, is its actual power to rule over the entire world, thanks to the legacy of the Roman Empire: "Freemasonry has taken into charge the role of legislator of the world, and we know that it has been successful in achieving this."[334]

The difference between Hermes' Hermeticism and Enoch's Freemasonry, then, lies in their spiritual functions. The first establishes the spiritual climate in which Europeans grow. The latter acts as an esoteric judge over the entire world. However, both Hermes

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[333] Valsan, "Les Derniers," 161-83: "Nous voulons parler surtout des milieux constitués par des peuples autres que ceux auxquels furent adressés directement et, donc, de façon plus adéquate les messages des fondateurs de traditions de forme religieuse (comme le Christianisme et l'Islam), respectivement les gentils et les non-arabes, chez lesquels l'hermétisme était du reste autochtone, du moins dans la région méditerranéenne. Il semble que la persistance de cette tradition et son rôle dans les ordres de chevalerie qui assuraient la liaison avec le Proche-Orient, peuvent s'expliquer d'un côté par son intellectualité qui lui conférait un caractère de neutralité et d'universalité relative au milieu méditerranéen, d'un autre côté par les limitations naturelles que subissaient les valeurs spécifiques des religions d'origine judaïque et arabe chez les peuples d'autres races. La situation de l'hermétisme est ainsi comparable à celle qu'ont eue, sur le plan doctrinal, l'aristotélisme et le néoplatonisme, avec lesquels il s'est trouvé du reste ordinairement associé en fait. – Un autre cas de « minorité » qu'on pourrait citer ici est celui du Judaïsme dans la diaspora, et la kabbale dit que la Shekinah est alors en exil parmi les gentils." Emphasis is mine.

[334] Valsan, "Les Derniers," 161-83: "La Maçonnerie moderne a pris ainsi à sa charge, en même temps que les vestiges d'une hiérarchie ésotérique, le rôle de législateur du monde, et on sait avec quel succès."

and Enoch are identified with the prophet Idris, who is himself an emanation of the universal spiritual nature of Muhammad.

4.3.5 VALSAN'S CONSTRUCTION OF A NEO-HERMETIC UNIVERSAL IN THE LANGUAGE OF ISLAM

Valsan constructs a neo-Hermetic Islam that is attractive to both European Hermetic scholars and Freemasons. To the Europeans, this form of Islam conveys the message that they are naturally Hermetic and that, to reach their spiritual perfection, they only need to visualize a link between Hermes and Muhammad's universal spirit.

On the other hand, to Freemason readers, this form of Islam conveys that they belong to a powerful, esoteric organization. Nonetheless, Valsan reminds them that they need to recognize that they cannot reach their spiritual perfection within Freemasonry unless they follow Islam. Valsan also admits that Enoch (i.e., the authority of Freemasonry) is an emanation of the Muhammadan universal spirit. The horizontal universality of Freemasonry is integrated into but subordinate to the vertical universality of Ibn Arabī at the very point in which Enoch/Hermes/Idris confirms the spiritual perfection of the Muhammadan saint Ibn 'Arabī.

In the process of these discursive negotiations, Valsan creates a form of Islam that is historically compatible with both Freemason and European Hermetic spiritualities.

Hermeticism is divinely established for people (e.g., post-Christian Europeans) who have no religious form. Furthermore, it combines varied traditions such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Its vertical universality is thus natural for Europeans. However, Hermeticism can achieve perfection only in Valsan's neo-Hermetic Islam, as Valsan

knows that Ibn Arabī speaks with the voice of Idris and that Hermes as Idris is an emanation of the universal Muhammadan spirit.

Freemasonry is horizontally universal because it rules over the entire world. It can include Hermetic spiritualities, which are mostly European. However, it lacks the sacerdotal manifestation of the universal spirit. Valsan inscribes this lack in the signifier *Freemasonry* and invites the Freemasons to initiate a quest for a more complete spirituality that speaks its own language—in other words, Valsan's neo-Hermetic Sufism.

Islam is the entire manifestation of the universal spirit. It is above Freemasonry, not under it. The personas of Enoch (i.e., Idris, as he rules over Freemasonry) and Hermes (i.e., Idris as he rules over European Hermeticism) are partial manifestations of the universal Muhammadan spirit.

For clarity, I now synthesize the discursive negotiations present in Valsan's construction of a neo-Hermetic universalist Islam:

a. Two philosophies—Freemasonry and Christian Hermeticism—refer to the same Islamic authority (that of the Prophet Idris, who has two names in the European context: Enoch and Hermes). Through the name Enoch, Valsan's fabrication of the meaning he associates to Idris, Islam rules over Free-Masonry (e.g, the esoteric power that rules over the world). Through the name Hermes, Valsan's fabrication of the meaning he associates to Idris, Islam rules over Hermeticism (e.g, the indigenous spirituality of Europeans).

b. Freemasonry successfully rules over the entire world, Valsan says, but it does not rule over Islam because the latter is a complete tradition that is directly linked to the primordial and universal tradition. Valsan's active purpose when

editing the *Etudes Traditionnelles* journal was to establish Islam as a tradition that could supervise the Hermetic and Freemason traditions of Europe.

c. Islam, as an exoteric religion, lacks the capacity to apply the phrase "*even if*," which characterizes Valsan's reconstruction of the esoteric meaning associated with Islam. Furthermore, although Islam is not Hermetic per se, he says that it is surely more Hermetic than Freemasonry is because it has direct access to Idris, who in turn has direct access to Muhammad's universal spirit. On the other hand, Freemasonry and Hermeticism both lack direct access to the supreme esoteric function that rules over their lodges and prayer houses.

Valsan's esoteric Islam is thus constructed as a meta layer upon:

- Free-Masonry

- Hermeticism

- An alleged "exoteric" Islam.

4.3.6 WHAT DO VALSAN'S THREE META-LEVEL TRUTHS MEAN?

In his article "Ur-Fascism," Eco argues that traditionalist scholars such as Evola, who attempt to gather the eclectic symbols of various cultures as a coherent whole, need to always add a meta layer of truth above the totality of symbols and concepts that they intertwine inside the same unique discourse:

This new culture had to be syncretistic. Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, "the combination of different forms of belief or practice"; such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a silver of wisdom, and whenever they seem to say different or incompatible things it is only because all are alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval

truth. As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth has been already spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.[335]

This act—by which a meta-level truth pushes the universality of the universal into increasingly transcendental realms—is precisely what Valsan does to construct a form of neo-Hermetic universalist Islam that both includes and rules over not just European Hermetics but also European Freemasons and exoteric Muslims.

Valsan builds this meta level using the expression "even if" to distance himself from those whom he condemns as exoteric Muslim scholars. He then uses the name *Ibn 'Arabī* to establish a modern Hermetic interpretation of religion (one that is universalist, highly intellectual, and tied to an esoteric and occult history of relationships between cultures) that is above that of the exoteric Muslim scholars.

Finally, he establishes the authority of the Qur'anic prophet Idris over his European emanations: Hermes (the spiritual authority of Hermeticism) and Enoch (the spiritual authority of Freemasonry).

To answer the question of how Valsan dragged Ibn Arabī's name into his own theopolitical views, I would like to consider Valsan's translation of Qūnawī's *Risalah at-Tawajjuh al-Ataam.* I specifically analyze Valsan's hermeneutical decisions in the translation of the text on the proper orientation by which the Sufi attains the goal of

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[335] Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.nybooks.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism. Perennialist scholars such as the Ismaili author Ali Lakhani have responded to Eco's critiques. See: Ali Lakhani, "Umberto Eco, Fascism and Tradition," Religio Perennis, accessed April 22, 2018, http://www.religioperennis.org/documents/Lakhani/Umberto%20Eco.pdf. Lakhani argues that Eco does not consider the details of the sacred doctrine that present a symmetry between human faculties, society, and the "great chain of being" in the correct hierarchy. Nonetheless, Lakhani does not present his idea of what tradition is; instead, he reshapes and reframes Islamic beliefs and postulates the existence of a sacred doctrine without discussing his basic assumptions.

reaching God's proximity. First, I indicate the three religious models that Valsan refers to in his footnotes. I then trace how they differ from Qūnawī's teachings. Next, I show how the Arabic and French texts have strikingly different ways of connecting the notions of death, the body, and enjoyment. Finally, I provide some hints regarding the various principles of spiritual visions that Valsan and Qūnawī enacted.

4.4 Tracing Michel Valsan's Procedures for Rewriting Pre-Modern Islamic Epistemologies According to Modern Perennialist Epistemological Coordinates by Analyzing His Translation of a Text by Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī

4.4.1 Three European Religious Models Used by Valsan

Valsan published his translation of the Qūnawī's "Risalah at-Tawajjuh al-ataam" in November-December 1966[336] in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, the journal of which he was the director. In this epistle, Qūnawī, Ibn 'Arabī's step-child and heir, instructs his disciples to direct their intention toward God's unity. This publication belongs to the last part of Valsan's life, during which he focused on presenting the Islamic legacy rather than articulating a Perennialist philosophy based on the comparison of eclectic esoteric texts.

Valsan uses three religious-philosophical models when translating Qūnawī's text into French: the Platonist model of late antiquity, the Masonic understanding of the Christian sacraments, and a vocabulary drawn from the 18th-century Catholic Martinist movement (Louis Claude de Saint-Martin 1743-1803).

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[336] Valsan, "Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite," 241-268. The bilingual version here used is edited by Michel Valsan's son, Muhammad Valsan, on the website Sciencesacrée.com: Michel Valsan, Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite, ed. Muhammad Valsan, pp. 2-38 accessed on the 15.08.2014: https://www.sciencesacree.com/pages/les-ecrits-de-michel-valsan.html. This edition is no more online but has been published as a book: Michel Valsan, *Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite* (Paris: L'Île Verte, 2019).

Valsan quotes the philosopher Numenius (2nd century CE) in his sixth footnote after drawing a parallel between Qūnawī's description of the maritime travel of the *murid* (the Sufi who aspires to the knowledge of God), who returns to Allah by cleansing himself of his bad habits, and Ulysses' journey. Qūnawī uses the word *sufun* to designate the boats on which the Sufi symbolically travels. The only occurrences of this root in the Qur'an are 29:15, where it refers to Noah's ark, and 18:71 and 79, where it is included in the story of the meeting between Moses and Khidr[337]. As Qūnawī conceives of boats that journey toward the *maqam al-ḥaqq al-yaqin* (spiritual station of the truth of absolute certainty), it is probable that he meant the ark of Nuḥ, or Noah. Nuḥ is upheld in Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al- Ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) as possessing the wisdom to purify himself by integrating two contrasting attitudes: proclaiming the commonalities between a creature and God (*tashbīh*) and proclaiming God's remoteness (*tanzīh*). Valsan claims Numenius expresses a similar position on the soul, but is this the case?

Numenius believed in ontological and ethical dualism. He also believed in three gods: the immutable god of which nothing can be said, the demiurge who is accountable for the material world and conceals the first god, and the god who is responsible for discursive thinking and is equal with the world. According to this belief system, the good soul is the result of the divine intellect instilled in the human body. Numenius seems to have believed in an intense battle between the good soul, which is detached from the body

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[337] Khidr is the green saint or prophet who, according to the Qur'an, taught Moses a knowledge that was given him directly from God, Qur'an (18: 65-82).

and controls its form, and the bad soul, which is influenced by the material world[338].

Numenius also believed in transcendental esotericism, which examines the world's various religious traditions in search of common universal wisdom. This philosophical perspective allowed him to consider contemporary traditions, such as those of the Pythagoreans, Brahmans, Magi, and Egyptians, under the umbrella of the one hidden god. Numenius also spoke often of Moses, but recent research has revealed that he did not intend to discuss Jewish monotheism, but the dualism of Zoroastrianism and Hermetic gnosis[339]. Since the 16th century, Numenius has often appeared on lists of initiated wise men who are thought to have transmitted perennial wisdom.

Qūnawī eliminated any form of dualism by appealing to God's language, which animates creation and the Qur'an. This establishes a comprehensive union[340] between God's essence and knowledge in which the essences of all human persons are intentioned by a discourse that speaks to them. God's intention to speak precedes the ontological existence of the immutable essence of oneself. In this way, the five divine presences[341] Qūnawī advocates for understanding the world are not to be understood in a rigid ontological way by attributing to them the only texture of being. On the contrary, in Qūnawī's model, which attributes to them the texture of language, it is easier to understand

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[338] Karin Alt, *Weltflucht und Weltbejahung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 101.

[339] Mark J. Edwards, "Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1990), 64-75.

[340] Shaker translates the Arabic term *jam'i* in this way. In English, *comprehensive union* often refers to the marriage contract between man and woman, which is a union of body, actions, and commitment. This context deontologizes the term and restores its juristic dimension.

[341] These five divine presences are the presence of the inward, presence of the spirits, presence of the perfect man, presence of imagination, and presence of the outward. As Shaker notes, Qūnawī adds a sixth degree: the degree of negation. See: Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 243-44.

what they are: a noetic approach to living in an ever clearer way the direct sovereignty of

God by intensifying one's proclamation of the *tawḥīd*[342].

b. The Masonic understanding of the Catholic sacraments

Valsan's second religious model is inspired by the theology of the Christian

sacraments. Qūnawī explains two moments in the life of the Sufi. In the first, the Sufi enters

the degree of universal predisposition, or the root of being, the non-locus in which being is

instantiated by God's will and the Sufi is stripped of his egotistic habits[343]. Upon arriving at

this station, the Sufi receives a second instillation, which is relative to the instauration of the

perception of God's names and qualities. It is only in this in-between that the Sufi is capable

of experiencing the epiphany of the divine essence[344].

Valsan sees an analogy between this concept and the Catholic doctrine of the

sacraments. The first moment is equivalent to baptism, and the second moment is

comparable to confirmation. Both moments produce, according to Valsan, the birth of the

"universal man". For a student of the history of Western esotericism, this expression is less

a literal translation of *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (the Perfect Human Being) and more the Christian

Kabbalist understanding of the universal Christ, who acts as a second god and unifying

being. Moreover, this second god governs the spiritual elite and, through them, the world.

According to Molitor,

> The real connections between the divine, the heavenly world, and Man happen
>
> through the sacraments. There exist sympathies in nature . . . that *through the*

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[342] Christian Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie islamique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 440, 30n.
[343] Valsan, "Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite," 26.
[344] Valsan, "Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite," 27-28.

sacraments act upon Man by communicating him higher and divine powers. These

act foremost initially on the body (Leib) and spirit of Man and only in a second

moment on his internal and higher being . . . . Who doubts that similar sympathies

exist in Nature and doubt in the powers of sacraments should be reminded of the

following words of Saint Paul (Corinthians 1.10: 16-17): "*Is not the cup of*

thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And

is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there

is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." [345]

More specifically, Valsan explains his views on the sacraments in a text on the highest

Masonic degrees. In this text, he links the Catholic sacraments with the sacrifice of Christ

and the power of his blood, by which mankind is regenerated in the glorious body of a

universal Christ:

On pourrait remarquer aussi que la Blessure du salut, coïncidant avec le symbole

de l'Etre divin, fait ressortir la présence réelle de cet Etre dans le sacrifice accompli

aussi bien que dans *les sacrements qui en découlent*. De plus, comme le triangle

avatârique est rayonnant, on pourrait y voir aussi un symbole qui réunit, en les

identifiant, le Christ souffrant et le Christ glorieux.[346]

The difference between Qūnawī and Valsan is evident. For Valsan, as for Franz-Joseph

Molitor before him, blood plays a role in the transformation of the spiritual aspirant insofar

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[345] Franz-Joseph Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte, oder über die Tradition*, vol. 4 (Münster, 1853), 4:191 paragraph 190. My emphasis.

[346] Michel Valsan, "Les derniers hauts grades du rites écossais." My emphasis.

as flesh can be transformed through a sacrifice that reconciles the aspirant with the hidden god.

For Qūnawī, the Sufi's transformation does not occur through sacrifice, but through God's extinguishing of all false sovereignties by which man qualifies himself. Indeed, on page 34, the Arabic uses the word *istihlakiḥa*, which Valsan translates as *destruction*. In the Qur'an, this verb often indicates the destruction of unjust cities, but one verse fits precisely with Qūnawī's ideas. This verse refers to the words that the unbeliever and unjust man says when he is judged: "My power has perished (*halaka*) from me" (69:29)[347]. *Perished* is a translation of *halaka* and indicates that the man's power no longer belongs to him. In the same way, Qūnawī demonstrates that God's sovereignty (*ḥukm waḥda rabbiḥi*) and power (*sultāniḥi*) is felt more than before at this stage of the spiritual quest.

c. The word *organe* and the Martinist movement

Valsan's third model relates to the history of Martinism, a spiritual school that, at least in its 18th-century German incarnation, had its roots in the encounter between Franz von Baader's (1765-1841) Catholic esotericism and Martinez de Pasqually's (1727-1774) Catholic theurgical teachings.[348] The French authors—who were also two disciple of de Pasqually—Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730-1824) and Claude de Saint-Martin (1743- 1803) were initially responsible for the school's German orientation, especially in Franz- Joseph Molitor's case. Willermoz and de Saint-Martin used the concept of the *organe* to indicate the capacity of the superior man of this occult hierarchy to receive Christ's

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[347] Translation by Abdallah Yusuf Ali. *The meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2003).
[348] Franz von Baader, *Les enseignements secrets de Martinès de Pasqually* (Paris, Bibliothèque Chacornarc, 1900): accessed on 21.09.2016: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k681383/f6.image.

message and propagate it through occult channels. For instance, de Saint-Martin writes, "It is on this sacred throne that I have put you as a second God . . . I have chosen you to be my universal *organe*; everything from me will be known."[349]

Valsan employs the concept to designate the prophet Muhammad. In France, two schools believed themselves the perfect heirs of Guénon: the Martinist movement led by Jean Tourniac (1919-1995) and the neo-Sufi movement led by Valsan. Valsan skips over Qūnawī's complex formula, "*Alsinat sufarāihi,*" which could have been translated in another context as "tongue of His ambassadors." Instead, Valsan inserts the word *organe* into the text. What he misses is the act of speech (*khiṭāb*, which is the Qur'an) and the political metaphor of ambassadors who transmit the king's words or speech. Instead, he deeply bureaucratizes the relation between God's Essence and his messenger with the word *organe*. In French, this term also indicates, for instance, the police, *l'organe d'Etat*, the *organe* of the state, and puts the prophet Muhammad in the place of the second god who serves as the face of the hidden first god by recalling the theology of Numenius and Claude de Saint-Martin.

Therefore, two features of Qūnawī and Valsan's spirituality vary. First, on a metaphysical level, Perennialism fails to understand the comprehensive union between God's essence and God's knowledge of the immutable essences. Perennialism understands this concept ontologically, whereas Qūnawī seems to understand it juridically. Second, Valsan and Qūnawī also differ on the question of the Sufi's transformation, which leads toward a homogeneous totality of being in Perennialism but toward a linguistic act beyond

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[349] Louis-Claude De Saint-Martin, *Dix prières extraites des œuvres posthumes* , accessed on June 19, 2014, http://www.philosophe-
-inconnu.com/Bibliotheque/Ouvres_posthumes/dix_priere_o_posthumes.pdf.

the first intellect in Qūnawī's work. This linguistic act expresses God's intention to speak to man. His self-disclosure is primarily linguistic. These two points are entirely erased by the theology of the second personalized divinity that runs through Valsan's translation.

4.4.2 DEATH, BODY, AND ENJOYMENT: HOW QŪNAWĪ AND VALSAN COMBINE THESE THREE REALITIES

In this section, I discuss the differences between Valsan's models and Qūnawī's writing, but how do we see these conflicting discourses' presence in action? Regarding death, the body, and jouissance (sexual pleasure, enjoyment) Lacan said in a seminar that at these three points, the real—which is pushed away by one's imagination as well as by one's intent to symbolize the world in a closed totality in which all meanings are forever fixed—becomes more perceptible than elsewhere. This the case because nothing can be said about these things. If something is said about them, the word has already missed its target because it is not symmetrical to the signified object, and the speaker has said too much or too little.[350]

How do Qūnawī and Valsan tie together death, the body, and jouissance, the fundamental elements that shape the rhythm of our existence? These three items cannot be fully conveyed using language and thus seem always to escape attempts to conceptualize them. This is accomplished by explicating moments linked to these three semantic fields in which Valsan skips an Arabic sentence, adds words not present in the Arabic text to advance his intended meaning, or translates an Arabic word into a French word that does not share the same semantic field.

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[350] Jacques Lacan, *Seminaire XXI, Les non-dupes errent* (1973-1974): 184, accessed on December 1, 2016, http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/S21_NON-DUPES---.pdf: "ces termes donc se font les trois, les trois du Réel, en tant que le Réel lui-même est trois . . . à savoir: la jouissance, le corps, la mort, en tant qu'ils sont noués, qu'ils sont noués seulement, bien entendu, par cette impasse invérifiable du sexe."

a. Death

If we examine the question of death, Qūnawī acknowledges discontinuities, but Valsan sees continuities. On page 3 of Valsan's translation of Qūnawī's epistle[351], he writes, "And He makes them *cut off (qat'a)* from each phase to (reach) another phase," whereas Valsan skips this word to suggest a superficial sense of homogeneity: "He makes them evolve from a phase to another phase." On page 32, Qūnawī writes, "when man becomes an intimate of dhikr,[352] it is as if he would be separated (*Kā-l-mafāriq*) from the world." Valsan translates this passage as "it is as if he would be dead to the world for some regards." Valsan inserts the world *dead*, but Qūnawī does not use it.

Where Qūnawī sees the process of dying as being stripped of something, Valsan sees it as a metaphor (cf. the expression "for some regards") that upholds an analogical continuity. Where Qūnawī insists on the discontinuity of the noetic experience lived by the Sufi, Valsan explores the continuity of being. In Qūnawī's model, the body is connected to death, so knowledge of this knot (between deah and the body) is possible because this knowledge is gained when one is cut off from one's previous spiritual phase. Valsan blurs this connection to affirm the expansive universality of being.

b. Body

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[351] The bilingual version here used is edited by Michel Valsan's son, Muhammad Valsan, on the website Sciencesacrée.com: Michel Valsan, Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite, ed. Muhammad Valsan, pp. 2-38, accessed on the 15.08.2014: https://www.sciencesacree.com/pages/les-ecrits-de-michel-valsan.html. This edition is no more online but has been published as a book: Michel Valsan, *Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite* (Paris: L'Île Verte, 2019).
[352] This term refers to the recitation of Qur'anic words that helps one follow the path that leads to one's pre-created state.

On page 11[353], Qūnawī writes, "every intelligent (person) cognizes that the heart of which the Real (*al ḥaqq*) has noticed us by the language/tongue of the Prophet is . . ." whereas Valsan translates this as "Every intelligent being knows that the heart of which Allah has taught his Prophet is " The term Valsan translates as *taught* is *Lisān an-naby biqawlihi*. By erasing references to "the tongue/language of the Prophet," Valsan erases the willed act of speech and replaces it with the more general *taught*.

On page 12, Qūnawī discusses the battle to eliminate the inner confusion of one's body. He uses the term *inḥirafya*,[354] which strongly recalls an important notion in Qūnawī's writings: *ḥarf*, or *letter*[355]. In other words, for Qūnawī, confusion is linked with the idea of speaking or writing in a confused manner. Valsan translates this as *unharmonious*, which opens up the semantic field of chemistry rather than speech. If, in the French translation, *harmonious* is opposed to *unharmonious* through the use of the prefix *dis* (*harmonique*/*disharmonique*), Qūnawī contrasts two semantic fields. Confusion is linked to the incorrect order of letters (*inḥirafya)*; balance is linked to the semantic field of justice, or divine justice (*al-'itidāl*).

In both examples, Valsan erases speech to frame the discussion in terms of a more mechanical world order akin to rules that, ideally, must be demonstrated but not spoken.

c. Enjoyment

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[353] The bilingual version here used is edited by Michel Valsan's son, Muhammad Valsan, on the website Sciencesacrée.com: Michel Valsan, Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite, ed. Muhammad Valsan, pp. 2-38, accessed on the 15.08.2014: https://www.sciencesacree.com/pages/les-ecrits-de-michel-valsan.html. This edition is no more online but has been published as a book: Michel Valsan, *Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite* (Paris: L'Île Verte, 2019).

[354] The Qur'anic reference here is (2:75).

[355] For the centrality of the meditation on letters, which is not fully acknowledged by Valsan, see Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Montreal: Xlibris, 2012), 145.

If we now examine how the question of how desire is dealt with in the two texts, we find some sharp distinctions. On page 9[356], Qūnawī writes, "And He (*āmaranā*) ordered us for His tawḥīd and He strongly inclines toward us (*raghbnā*) for us to go in a solitary retreat and research felicity and to be interested in him." Valsan translates *raghbnā* as *desire*. This word, which indicates the intensity of the desire for God, is found in the Qur'an (94:8): "and unto thy Lord turn with love."[357] In this way, Valsan loses the idea of strongly inclining toward someone or something. However, a few words later, Qūnawī mirrors God's inclination with the aspirant's inclination toward God's knowledge. "It is necessary for every intelligent believer who looks for deliverance of his soul and who strongly inclines (*rāghib*) toward the act of reaching the object of his success, that is to say (*tahsyl*) the station of proximity." Valsan skips the verb *tahsyl*, which refers to the process of obtaining the object of one's desire, and directly connects the word *desire* with the word *station*. What is missed here is the gesture of this desire, which, according to its use in the original text, is the inclination of God toward man and of man toward God. This gesture that expresses the desire is entirely missed by Valsan because he directly connects desire and station by omitting the semantic field where this connection takes place. We elaborate on this important omission in the following section.

Two hermeneutic principles and practices are at work in this translation. On page 9, Qūnawī writes, "We do not doubt also that He is nobler than us as we are in poverty toward Him and in need of His richness (*istifādihi*) for our existence He gives us and of

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[356] The bilingual version here used is edited by Michel Valsan's son, Muhammad Valsan, on the website Sciencesacrée.com: Michel Valsan, Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite, ed. Muhammad Valsan, pp. 2-38, accessed on the 15.08.2014: https://www.sciencesacree.com/pages/les-ecrits-de-michel-valsan.html. This edition is no more online but has been published as a book: Michel Valsan, *Epître sur l'Orientation Parfaite* (Paris: L'Île Verte, 2019).

[357] Here I give Muhammad Asad's translation of the verse.

His succor (*imdādihi*) upon us." Valsan translates this sentence in the following way: "We do not doubt that He is more noble than us, as we are in a state of necessity of Him: as He gives us existence and he gives us the existential subsistence (*imdādihi*)."

Qūnawī expert Anthony Shaker translates *imdād* as *succor*. This concept is central to Qūnawī's teachings. Shaker observes that, for Qūnawī, it is "the truest and most desired knowledge."[358] Man is powerless to fulfill his desire. Therefore, only God's succor can fulfill man by providing knowledge of man's essence. The knowledge of one's essence precedes its existence. It shapes a space that cannot be reduced to an ontological, mechanical way of thinking but maintains its openness only if understood through speech. In this subjective space, God personally cares for His servant.

On page 4, Qūnawī writes, "on the boats of *'anayat*," which Valsan translates with a generic word, *providence*, obscuring the idea that the servant is personally cared for by God. Providence suggests an abstract universal principle that governs the whole of creation indistinctly.

However, providence as described by Qūnawī indicates an election that occurs above the first intellect. In fact, above the first intellect, the oneness of God confers on the elected Sufi an outpouring of mercy (*fayḍ al-aqdas*) and singularization that is upheld at its most intense by Muhammad. For Valsan, between the first intellect and the divine essence lies an act of identification which is rendered by the concept of supreme identity, which dates back to Ivan Aguéli,[359] who compared Ibn 'Arabī and the French occult playwright

[358] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 180.

[359] Ivan Aguéli, "Pages dédiées au Soleil," in *La Gnose* 1911 reprinted in Ivan Aguéli, Ecrits pour La Gnose, ed. G. Rocca (Milan: Archè, 1988), 56. See also above 2.6.1 René Guénon on God's Oneness.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.[360] This French concept hints at the idea that the first god expands

the universality of being through the governance of the second god (in a perennialist context

this refers to the personalized second god, the first intellect as well as the face of the perfect

being). For Valsan, in line with René Guénon's thinking, the difference between creatures

and God is overcome by the universal manifestation of the only being through the

identification of the universal self with the "I" manifested in the illusory plurality of

individuals. If Guénon and Valsan identify a path to the divine through self- identification,

this is not the case for Qūnawī.[361]

Qūnawī dismisses such an approach as too philosophical and exalts a path of

servitude based on a consonance between noetic levels, or consonance through God's

speech: the Qur'an addressed to and recited by God's perfect servant.[362]

If, for Valsan, it is difficult to conceive of an articulated noetic event beyond the first

intellect, for Qūnawī, it is precisely beyond the first intellect that election and personifying

succor takes place. In his correspondence with at-Tusi, Qūnawī writes that

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[360] For the occult dimension of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, see Pierre Mariel's introduction to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Axël* (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1969), 4.

[361] According to Shaker, the difference between God and creatures is not overcome by the extention of being over all singularities. Instead, a commonality exists between God and creatures the formula for which is *ḥaqq al-ḥaqq*. The first *ḥaqq* (+-right) represents the creature empowered by the judgment and the second represents God's judgment. See Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality*, 279. Omar Benaïssa relates this saying by Qūnawī: "From where (have you come?) and to where (are you going?), and what happens between the two?" (min ayn ilā ayn, fa mā al-hāsil fī l-bayn?). He provides an impromptu answer that gives the question a metaphysical significance: "(We have come) from (divine) knowledge (and we are going) towards the Essence. What happens in *between is the renewal of a relationship that unites the two extremes and appears through both determinations*." See "The degree of the station of no-station," *Journal of the Ibn 'Arabī Society*, Vol. 37 (2005). Emphasis is mine.

[362] See Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality*, 179. Qūnawī might be much nearer to Maimonides than to the entanglement of Hermeticism and peripatecism we find in Ibn Sab'in and perhaps even in at-Tusi. As for Maimonides, we refer especially to the post-cognitive degree beyond the first intellect, which is the property of the perfect one who acknowledges the miracle of ex nihilo creation through the careful providence that God showers on him. Qūnawī and at-Tusi are distinguished by two guiding desires. At-Tusi's dream, as Jambet puts it, is attaining immortality. See *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie islamique?*, 186. Qūnawī's quest is echoing God's sovereignty (*ḥukm*).

the Perfect Human Being is on an isthmus between the degree of possibilities and the degree of necessity. On this isthmus (*barzakh*) through the side of necessity he becomes light according to a prophetic invocation which says "put a light on me." On the side of the isthmus that pertains to the possibilities, we find a relationship with the divine through a chain of mediation.[363] Because the first intellect is the first degree of this chain, the Perfect human being is beyond the first intellect. This space, which is beyond the noetic grasp of the first intellect, is expressed through the act of writing the Qur'an. Qūnawī uses many words to designate this space, and all are linked with writing or speaking. One of these notions is *irtisām* (inscription). In his teachings, Qūnawī discusses God's writing, which is not written but suggests the rhythm of the act of writing God's intentions, or the moment of *imdād*, which is the moment between God's concern for the essences that will be manifested and their existentiation.

The Qur'an states, "Does man not remember that We had created him before this (also) whilst he was just nothing?" (19:67)[364] and "Has there not been over Man a long period of Time, when he was nothing—(not even) mentioned?" (76:1)[365].

Qūnawī believed that God is concerned with individual letters, which in combination give order to the world while forming the sentences of the Qur'an. Examining this space beyond the first intellect through speech enables the thinker not to reify his own act of conceptualizing. Speech and writing enable one to saying something by bringing life

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[363] Kitāb al-Mufawadat, "Briefwechsel Zwischen Ṣadr ud-Dīn-ee Qūnawī (gest. 673/1274) und Naṣīr ud-dīn Ṭūsī (gest. 672/1274)" Edited and commmented by Gudrun Schubert (PhD diss., Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 48-49.

[364] Translated by Muḥammad Tahir ul-Qadri, 2011.

[365] Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 2002.

to the blank spaces that manifest the intention (*qaṣd*) of the speech by the movement of the sound of the Arabic vowels[366].

If Shaker translates *sh'an* as *concern*[367], he does so in reaction to Chittick's translation of the word as *task*. Shaker chooses *concern* to avoid succumbing to a mechanistic worldview. Valsan translates the term as *function*, once again appealing to a bureaucratic worldview. By ignoring the fact that Qūnawī avoided the thinker's reification process, Valsan adopted a dualistic worldview (e.g, his appropriation of Numenius) and inclined toward a metaphysical worldview that actualizes the governance of the first intellect rather than the search for God's sovereignty through His speech.

In other words, Valsan participates in a theopolitical worldview akin that of Numenius and the one governed by the universal Christ, broadly diffused through the cultural framework of Martinism. Here, as for Numenius and later Martinism, the second god, or demiurge, completes the power of the first inoperant god by governing in his name. Instead, we learn that in the *worldhearing* of Qūnawī, God's sovereignty is conveyed through His speech. In this scenario, the Perfect Human Being does not govern in the name of any first god, but makes divine sovereignty perceptible to his followers by echoing God's speech. Qūnawī's monotheism seeks an existential position where, through the opposition of the divine names, such as Majestic and Beautiful, and beyond the totality of being, the Perfect Human Being embodies a linguistic relation to the oneness of God that qualifies him to proclaim God's oneness.[368] On the other hand, Numenius and Valsan seek the first god to establish the second god as a means for expanding the universality of

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[366] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 249.
[367] Shaker, 123, 22n, 23n, and 24n.
[368] Shaker, 279.

the first god's occult being over the plurality and singularities of the different essences of the manifested things.

4.5 Valsan's Theopolitical Use of Ibn 'Arabī's Name

Like Guénon, Valsan distinguishes two planes of divinity. God's essence is known esoterically by the universal intellect, whereas the personalized divinity is addressed through prayer by common exoteric believers. Valsan also minimizes those Islamic beliefs that do not fit his modern Hermeticism by declaring them exoteric and thus ignorant of the esoteric God. The name of Ibn 'Arabī serves to establish a religious meta layer over the exoteric Islamic understanding of religion with which Valsan disagrees.

Valsan also understands the Perfect Human Being as one who has become aware of his identity within the esoteric divinity and can thus overcome the limitations of the second divinity. This act is accomplished through a bloody sacrifice that is in line with Molitor's Christian and Martinist Kabbalah. Valsan also ascribes this teaching to Ibn 'Arabī, even though it is difficult to identify a similar statement in his oeuvre. "Shaykh al-Akbar does not show in a clear way the aspect of the 'sacrificial victim' of his mission."[369]

Finally, Islamic law is not seen, as was the case for the Nahḍah philosopher 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd (before 1960), as possessing power that must be extended worldwide, but as something that stands above Freemasonry. In fact, it is Freemasonry as such that applies the esoteric power of the esoteric law worldwide: "Freemasonry has taken into

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[369] Michel Valsan, "Un texte de Shaykh al Akbar sur la Réalisation Descendante," *Etudes Traditionnelles* 307 (April-May 1953): 120.

charge the role of legislator of the world, and we know that it has been successful in achieving this." [370]

This process entails a bureaucratic vision of the cosmos filled with various spiritual functions. Qūnawī's insistence on the presence of a disruptive desire and numerous qualitative jumps between planes of reality are absent from this bureaucratic cosmos.

Valsan explains the process by which Islamic law oversees the legislative actions of Freemasonry worldwide through a supposed conversation between Ibn 'Arabī and the prophet Idris, whose emanations govern European Hermeticism (Hermes) and Freemasonry (Enoch): "We acknowledge that the spiritual authority that rules overs the Supreme Council of the Scottish Freemason Order is identical to the living prophet that the Islamic tradition names Idris" ."[371] Valsan constructs an Islamic Akbarian meta level over Freemasonry and Hermeticism. At the same time, he superimposes his esoteric neo- Hermetic interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings upon exoteric Islam. He denies that this form of Islam, which he has constructed through his discourses, possesses any complete, integral understanding of its teachings.

This process forces Ibn'Arabī's name to conform to Valsan's constructed neo-Hermetic Islam, from which two major features of Ibn'Arabī and Qūnawī's views are removed. First, Islam's abrogative function regarding previous traditions is cancelled. Second, the Islamization of transcendental truth to the extent that a qualitative jump is perceived between the silent contemplation of the Godhead by the esoteric philosopher and

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[370] Valsan, "Les derniers hauts grades de l'Ecossisme," : "La Maçonnerie moderne a pris ainsi à sa charge, en même temps que les vestiges d'une hiérarchie ésotérique, le rôle de législateur du monde, et on sait avec quel succès."

[371] Valsan, "Les derniers hauts grades de l'Ecossisme et la réalisation descendante," 161. "On constate ainsi que l'autorité spirituelle qui préside aux travaux du Suprême Conseil Ecossais est le même prophète vivant que l'Islam appelle Idrîs".

the Sufi's knowledge of God's intentions and rules in creating all-that-is-not-God is omitted.

5. HENRY CORBIN AND THE LUTHERAN-KABBALIST IBN'ARABĪ

The study of French speculative Sufism would be incomplete without an analysis of orientalist and Freemason Henry Corbin's (1903-1978) treatment of Ibn 'Arabī. Although he never converted to Islam, Corbin's books on Ibn 'Arabī and Shi'a Islam encouraged some of his students either to convert to Islam or to follow Corbin as a spiritual master. Among the most famous persons to have walked in Corbin's footsteps are Christian Bonaud (b. 1957), a Shi'a scholar and admirer of Khomeiny; Stephane Ruspoli, an expert on Ibn 'Arabī and Hallaj; Leili Anvar (b. 1967), a religion journalist and art historian; Philippe Moulinet, a divulgator of Sufism and political philosopher; and the renowned philosopher and metaphysician Christian Jambet (b. 1949). Within the academy, we also find the Sufism specialist Pierre Lory (b. 1952); the early Islamic spirituality expert Mohammad Ali-Amir Moezzi (b. 1956); and the founder of Western esoteric history, Antoine Faivre (b. 1934). Each of these individuals has deepened one of the areas that Corbin influenced through his prolific writings and oral teachings.

It is in fact through Corbin's radio interventions, books, and conferences that Ibn 'Arabī's name became known outside of Valsan's esoteric circles. Through Corbin's influence, Ibn 'Arabī began to be associated with groups and individuals that had only minimal interest in spiritual questions and French occultism, such as Christian Jambet (b. 1949), one of the main leaders of the 1968 French Maoist Spontex revolution[372]. Once his revolutionary expectations deflated, he found in Corbin a spiritual master who gave him

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[372] Christian Jambet, Des Grecs à l'Iran, accessed 15.09.2019,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pK0XLfjpxE&t=6032s.

the tools to escape the sense of defeat that was common to the generation that witnessed neoliberalism's victory over its communist dreams.

Nonetheless, Corbin's insights belong to the polemic debates that were shaped by Guénon and Valsan. Throughout his life, Corbin strove to distance himself from Guénon and Valsan's understanding of spirituality while working within the categories that shaped their shared polemical field: esotericism and exotericism, the belief in a hyperborean primordial tradition,[373] Christian Kabbalah, and the desire to be part of the most eschatological tradition possible.

René Guénon[374] reviewed Corbin's book on the Hermetic philosopher Suhrawardi (1155-1191), which was published in 1939. In this review, Guénon argues that Corbin studied a Neoplatonist rather than a real Sufi, as Sufism speaks always in the name of a *silsila*, or chain of masters and disciples that, in Guénon's view, transmits an impersonal, esoteric doctrine. According to Guénon, Suhrawardi did not belong to any chain of initiation. In this polemical field, Corbin argued that any form of Guénonism was ultimately a dogmatism rather than an authentic perennial spiritual truth "The example shown above with regard the word 'aql is significant. "Guénonism" and its critique of the West is typically a western attitude. In fact, it is based on a strong rationalist system of though that Ibn 'Arabī would never ever considered being truthful".[375]

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[373] Henry Corbin, *L'homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris: Présence, 1971), 65: "*les Hyperboréens symbolisent l'homme dont l'âme a atteint une complétude et une harmonie telles, qu'elle est sans négativité ni ombre; elle n'est ni de l'orient ni de l'occident*". René Guénon, Symboles de la Science Sacrée (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 95: "*le symbole de la Balance polaire est en rapport avec le nom de Tula donné originairement au centre hyperboréen de la tradition primordiale*".

[374] René Guénon, book review of Henry Corbin, *Suhrawardi d'Alep, fondateur de la doctrine illuminative* (*ishrâqi*) (G.-P. Maisonneuve: Paris, 1939), in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, (1947), and republished in René Guénon, *Apercus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le taoisme* (Gallimard: Paris, 1973), 143-44.

[375] Henry Corbin, "Correspondance," in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale,* 68e Année, No. 2 (April-June 1963): 234-237.: L'exemple donné ci-dessus à propos du mot 'aql est particulièrement typique. Il

The present chapter is divided into three parts. The first part presents Corbin's biography and the spiritual families that he considered himself a part of (i.e. Lutheranism and Christian Kabbalah). In discussing his sense of belonging to these spiritualities, I answer the first general question that I have asked of each Perennialist scholar: To what European spiritual tradition does Corbin approximate Ibn 'Arabī's teachings?

The second part examines the book by which Corbin introduced Ibn 'Arabī to the public: *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (1958). I aim to demonstrate the means by which Corbin transformed Ibn'Arabī into a Protestant theologian with views akin to Johann Georg Hamann's (1730-1788) Kabbalistic Lutheranism.

The last part of the chapter addresses Corbin's agressive attacks against Sunni Islam and how this affects his treatment of Ibn 'Arabī 's name.

5.1 WHO WAS HENRY CORBIN?

Henry Corbin was a French philosopher who translated Heidegger as a young man and actively read René Guénon, whose ideas he used to promote Vietnamese independence[376]. Corbin, curious about the teachings of the East, studied Arabic and Sanskrit and received his diploma from the Ecole des Langues Orientales in 1929. In 1928, one of his professors, Louis Massignon, introduced him to the figure of Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahya ibn Habash Suhrawardī (1154-1191) [377], a Neoplatonist and Hermetic philosopher whom some Sufis considered a martyr. Suhrawardī's significance in Corbin's eyes was

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décèle dans un certain « guénonisme » et dans sa critique de l'Occident, un phénomène typiquement occidental. Bien que les auteurs de ces critiques croient parler comme des "Orientaux," leur "occidentalisme" se trahit dans leur parti pris d'un rationalisme systématique, qu'un Ibn 'Arabī n'aurait jamais admis."

[376] Trong-Ni [Henry Corbin], "Regards vers l'Orient," in *Tribune indochinoise*, 15 August, 1927, 4-5; Xavier Accart, "Identité et théophanies. René Guénon (1886-1951) et Henry Corbin (1903-1978)," in *Politica Hermetica* 16 (2002): 181-200.

[377] Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahya ibn Habash Suhrawardī, *Le Livre de la Sagesse Orientale*, trans. Henry Corbin (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

that he integrated the spiritual legacy of pre-Islamic Persia into his philosophy. For Guénon, the perennial tradition is to be found outside of Shi'a Islam, as he considers Shi'a Islam too emotional (that is, less attached to the centrality of the divine and first intellect). However, for Corbin, the perennial tradition and its esoteric aspects are found mainly in Sh'ia Islam and the German *Naturphilosophen*.[378]

Persia, Shi'a Islam, and Ismailism have fascinated France at least since the 19th century. The French poet Nerval (1808-1855) saw in the Druze community the true heirs of a hidden mystery that was inaccessible to the common enemies of the French people (i.e. Rabbinical Judaism and Sunni Islam), whom he believed held a legalistic worldview. He compared Druzes to the French Freemasons.[379] The debate over the true esoteric core of Islam was the beginning of a discussion between Guénon and Corbin in which Guénon never accepted Corbin's thesis that Shi'a Islam might be the true core of Islamic esotericism, and Corbin never accepted the Guénonian views upheld by many of his French, Turkish, Egyptian, Persian, and Pakistani academic colleagues.

His native informant in Iran was the Shi'a cleric Tabatabei (1892-1981), who promoted a philosophical interest in non-Islamic religions. According to Corbin, shortly before his final departure from Iran to France, an Iranian shaykh told him that if he was still not ready to convert to Islam, he should at least enter Freemasonry.[380]

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[378] Xavier Accart, "Identité et théophanies. René Guénon (1886-1951) et Henry Corbin (1903-1978)," *Politica Hermetica* - René Guénon, lectures et enjeux, 16 (2002): 176-200.

[379] Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Charpentier, 1851), 53 and 142-44.

[380] Jean-Albert Clergue Vila, "En quête de Henry Corbin, Chevalier Franc-Maçon" in *L'Initiation* 2 vol. 8, no. 4 (2009): 84-111 and 245-273. This research is also quoted by Wouter Hanegraaf in *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected knowledge in the Western Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 390. An online version of Vila's text is available at the following links. Part I: http://www.amiscorbin.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Clergue-Initiation-Corbin-et-la-franc-maconnerie-I.pdf; Part II: http://www.amiscorbin.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Clergue-Initiation-Corbin-et-la-franc-

In 1963, Corbin entered various Masonic lodges and eventually established a lodge inspired by the Rite Ecossais Rectifie, the Martinist ritual and spiritual doctrine followed by Guénon in his youth, as well as by Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860), one of the primary founders of Perennialism.

In parallel with his Martinist activities and academic career, Corbin founded l'Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, which promoted comparisons between the Abrahamic spiritualities according to the hermeneutical device Corbin outlined in his books.[381] This para-academic institution hosted scholars who exchanged views on spiritual sciences while fighting against the secular sciences that had, according to Corbin, suffocated the spirit of truth. Mircea Eliade delivered the institution's inaugural speech.

5.2 How has Corbin's Work Been Investigated in the Academy?

Henry Corbin has been approached from three academic perspectives:

- a hagiographical attitude best represented by French books about him

- a critical attitude that deconstructs his participation in the creation of the hegemonic and oppressive ideology of the Shah of Iran

- a third attitude that is interested in Corbin's life as a Freemason

The hagiographic attitude is best represented by his pupil Christian Jambet, who teaches Islamic philosophy at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, in homage to Corbin, he writes, "The Philosopher knows his contemplative friends inside a spiritual community.

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maconnerie-II.pdf. Both were consulted on April 27, 2016. Vila presented his research at the sixth *Journées Henry Corbin* on December 18, 2010.
[381] Wouter Hanegraff, *Esotericism and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 299-341.

The memory of this community stands outside of time and place"[382] This indicates how Jambet universalizes Corbin's name and philosophy as bearers of a transcendent mystical truth allegedly recognized by the Eastern and the Western worlds. Today, Corbinians also have an academic church that includes inquisitors and hagiographs. For instance, doctoral candidate Daniel Proulx's dedicated his master's dissertation[383] to a general presentation of Corbin's philosophy. He also acts as the gatekeeper of Corbin's archives.

The second group of studies on Corbin includes those scholars that have severely criticized Corbin for promoting a right-wing nationalist agenda in his translation of Islamic authors. Steven Wasserstrom argues that Corbin's later philosophy is corrupted by the intersection of capitalism and the constitution of Persian nationalism by the Shah Pahlevi. "Corbin's self described 'spiritual' Iran, served the Shah's 'imperial' Iran, a Cold War ally who stabilized extraction of petroleum for a billionaire American, who in turn, from his profits subsidized that 'spiritual' self-image."[384] Mark Corrado's 2004 master's dissertation[385] also demonstrated how Corbin's promotion of eternal Iranian wisdom that is directed against French secularism and agnosticism inherits Comte de Gobineau's (1816-1882) cultural strategies. Comte de Gobineau is famous for his racial theory, which influenced Nazi philosophies. Corrado, however, disagrees with Hamid Algar[386] and Wasserstrom, according to whom Corbin inherited the structural dichotomies that equated

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[382] Christian Jambet, "Avant-propos," in *Henry Corbin, Cahier de l'Herne* (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1981), 11-14. "Le philosophe connait ses amis de contemplation, en une commuanuté intérieure dont la mémoire se moque du temps et du lieu"

[383] Daniel Proulx, "Le parcours philosophique de Henry Corbin: phénoménologie-herméneutique et philosophie prophétique" (master's thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 2009), 129-131.

[384] Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Location: Publisher, year), 152.

[385] Mark Corrado, "Orientalism in Reverse: Henry Corbin, Iranian Philosophy, and the Critique of the West," (master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2004).

[386] Hamid Algar, "The Study of Islam: Henry Corbin," in *Religious Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (April 1980): 85-91.

Iranians with Aryans and Semites with Arabs. Nonetheless, Gregory Lipton consistently proves that Corbin transforms Ibn'Arabī into a pilgrim that leaves behind "Arab Law" to partake of the "Aryan and Persian Spirit":

> Corbin de-Arabizes and reframes Ibn 'Arabī according to Persianate terms through the construction of a "spiritual topography" between "Andalusia and Iran." As a "pilgrim to the Orient," Ibn 'Arabī leaves behind his "earthly homeland" in the Arab (i.e., Sunni) Occident and emerges in the Persian (Sufi/Shīʿite) Orient as the spiritual equal of Rumi. In so doing, Ibn 'Arabī "attained to the esoteric Truth," and as such passed *through and beyond the darkness of the Law and of the exoteric religion.*"[387]

Finally, the third group is interested in Corbin's Masonic activities. Hanegraaff writes that Corbin "adopted the metaphysical perspective of his favorite authors as his own, and opposed it in the strongest possible wordings against the 'disease,' 'profanation,' 'corruption,' even 'satanic inversion' represented by historical reductionism."[388] He also writes,

> Corbin's initiation into the Rite Ecossais Rectifié and its inner order, the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte, seems to have filled him with deep enthusiasm, as reflected in his great study on the Imago Templi discussed above: he was enchanted by its neo-Templar symbolism inspired by the theosophy of Martines de Pasqually, and his understanding of neo-Templar Freemasonry, Graal mythology, the "Inner Church," and the "Celestial Jerusalem" was profoundly

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[387] Gregory Lipton, "Making Islam Fit, Ibn 'Arabī and the Idea of Sufism in the West" (PhD diss., Chapel Hill University, 2013), 287.

[388] Wouter Hanegraff, *Esotericism and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 299.

indebted to these currents and the scholarship about them – from Arthur Edward Waite to Antoine Faivre himself. Given the very title of the Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem and his great study of the "Image of the Temple," it should be noted that ritual progress through the order of the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte is supposed to culminate in a vision of the celestial Jerusalem and the announcement that the candidate has now reached the doors of its Temple.[389]

5.3 CORBIN'S PROTESTANTISM: THE BIRTH OF A HERMENEUTICAL DEVICE

Corbin was born in 1903 to a Protestant haute bourgeoisie family[390] an always presented himself as a Protestant. Nonetheless, he first discovered the mysticism of the young Luther through Jean Baruzi (1883-1953).[391]

Young Luther's mysticism is best explained by his interpretation of a verse of the Psalms, "In iusticia tua libera me" (Ps 31,2). While narrating his conversion from sin to a virtuous Christian life, Luther told his audience that

> I was horror stricken and felt deep hostility towards these words, God's righteousness, God's judgment, God's work. For I knew only that justitia dei meant a harsh judgment. Well, was He supposed to save me by judging me harshly? If so, I was lost forever.[392]

Luther escaped from this anxiety by comparing the God of the Old Testament to the God of the Gospel. The God of the Bible asks man to accomplish an impossible task:

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[389] Hanegraff, 341-42.

[390] Jean Moncelon, "Henry Corbin, Orientaliste et Iraniste," on moncelon.fr, accessed on May 13, 2019, http://www.moncelon.fr/corbin5.htm.

[391] Jean Baruzi (1883-1953) was a historian of religion and philosophy who insisted on the experiential knowledge of God gained by mystics in their visions and narratives. He is best known for his studies on John of the Cross.

[392] Charles L. Mee, Jr., *White Robe, Black Robe: Pope Leo X, Martin Luther, and the Birth of the Reformation* (London: Putnam, 1972), chap. 8.

to act righteously even though he is a constant sinner. The God of the Gospel as the revelation of the hidden God, on the other hand, asks only to be believed in. Once Luther established this contrast, he compared two meanings of righteousness when noting that Moses and Jesus reveal different understandings of God: "It was when I discovered the difference between the Law and the Gospel, that they were two separate things, that I broke through." For the God of the Old Testament, obeying the law makes man righteous, but for the God of the Gospel, faith alone accomplishes this goal. Luther comes to this conclusion by insisting on the passive experience of suddenly becoming righteous through the gift of grace: "The righteousness of God is that gift by which a right man lives."[393]

Corbin grounds his interpretation of the *signifatio passiva* on the third chapter of Luther's comments on the Roman epistles.[394] Here, Luther conveys the idea that justification is a passive experience of God's authority that occurs after one believes in God's words. Moreover, he argues that righteous behavior is what God's justice wants to do and actively does through man: "The realization of his (God's) will is the answer to our prayer in which we asked that his will should be done as we do want what God wants . . . God's justification in his own words is our own justification."[395] By being made to believe in God's words, man is justified by God. This is the *significatio passiva* that Corbin identified in Luther's teachings.

This experience is read by Corbin as mystically superseding the manifested and lawgiving God to achieve the knowledge of the hidden God known through Christ's

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[393] Charles L. Mee, Jr., *White Robe, Black Robe: Pope Leo X, Martin Luther, and the Birth of the Reformation* (London: Putnam, 1972), chap. 8.

[394] Charles Haguenauer et al., "Conférences temporaires," in *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire 1939-1940* (Paris: EPHE, 1940), 85-102.

[395] Martin Luther, *Vorlesung über den Römerbrief 1515/1516* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 141.

sacrifice on the cross. Luther distinguishes the theology of the cross from the theology of glory. The theology of the cross meditates on the hidden God that becomes apparent on the cross in suffering and death, contradicting all expectations of what divinity should be.

In contrast, the theology of glory praises the hidden God through the belief in free will and the conviction that man is actively capable of knowing God and doing good works through his own initiative. Luther condemns the theology of glory as the knowledge of fools. In fact, he firmly believes that a theologian of the cross knows that by suffering God's presence in his own existence he receives the gift of righteousness.

Corbin explicitly stated that his meditation on the young Luther laid the foundation for his interpretation of Islam "It is this discovery that transformed the young Luther into the great commentator of Saint Paul. This peculiar hermeneutical situation is one that I have found in many mystical and philosophical texts of Islam".[396] Corbin's discovery of Luther's mystical experience did not fully answer the question of how one can know the hidden God of which Paul writes:

> You men of Athens, I perceive that you are very religious in all things. For as I
> passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with
> this inscription: 'To an unknown God' What therefore you worship in ignorance,
> this I announce to you (Acts 17:22-24).

This is why Corbin's Protestant faith combines Luther's teachings with those of the Protestant scholar Johann Georg Hamman (1730-1788), whose works he taught from 1937 to 1938 at l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes. Hamann was a customs officer who, after an inner conversion to Luther's theology, devoted his life to the critique of all knowledge not

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[396] Henry Corbin, "De Heidegger à Sohravardi," in *Henry Corbin, Cahier de l'Herne* (Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 1981), 25.

driven by the pure faith in God's cross. From the beginning of his lectures on Hamann, Corbin insisted that he read Hamann as a revivalist of Lutheran theology[397].

Hamann held that to be a good interpreter of ancient texts, one needed to be a Kabbalist who found unstated wisdoms in old texts. In the text analysed by Corbin in 1937, Hamann wears the mask of the Kabbalistic philologian to make unknown things appear through and in language. Corbin calls the process by which naming a thing makes it appear "*l'apparition même des choses, leurs révélation par nomination.*"[398]

Furthermore, Hamann reveals the names of the hidden things through the movement by which he interprets the logos that he passively experiences. Corbin notices that "only the one who has been grasped by the spirit of Scriptures knows the meanings of the Scriptures. This process implies a transformation, not of man but rather of God. The instrument of this transformation is nothing else than the Scriptures".[399]

Hamann then further explains that the contradictions between life and death are united thought God's kenosis on the cross: "The God who is Life becomes Death so that he comes to embody Death itself." Ultimately, "the cross of Christ is the wisdom of all contradictions."[400] Thus, any knowledge given by the law must be superseded by the knowledge given to those who have received the pure gift of faith. The faith of the newborn Christian is the third term that comes from the structural opposition between the

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[397] Henry Corbin, *J.G. Hamann, Philosophe du Luthérianisme* (Paris: Berg, 1985), 17.

[398] Henry Corbin, "Introduction to J.G Hamann, Aesthetice in Nuce," in *Henry Corbin, Cahier de l'Herne* (Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 1981), 1936.

[399] Henry Corbin, *Hamann, Philosophe du Luthérianisme* (Paris: Berrg, 1985), 18. "Seul saisit l'esprit de l'Ecriture, celui qui l'éprouve en soi-même; or cela suppose une métamorphose qui est l'oeuvre, non de l'homme, mais de Dieu, et dont l'instrument n'est à son tour rien d'autre que l'Ecriture."

[400] Friedemann Fritsch, *Communicatio Idiomatum: Zur Bedeutung Einer Christologischen Bestimmung für das Denken Johan Georg Hammans* (Berlin: Walter De Greuter, 1999), 138.

law and the ugliness of man's sins. Furthermore, through its graceful emergence, the third term erases the structural conflicts of these two features.

Those who become virtuous by God's power alone know that reason and law are given to men only for them to know the power and ugliness of their actions: "The Law has been given to the Jews not with the purpose of guiding them towards righteousness but rather to demonstrate how irrational our reason is and furthermore that our errors must increase through our obedience to the Law"[401] Such individuals can reconcile these opposites by diving into the darkness of sin and initiating a process by which the "whole of nature is regenerated in Christ."[402]

The law that was made for men to recognize their inner ugliness becomes a virtuous one if it is moved by the *significatio passiva*, which finds its climax in the crucifixion of Christ.

Before his studies on Islam, Corbin understood the opposition between the *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis* only in terms of a critique against Catholicism and its doctrine of free will. Along with Hamann, he identified Catholicism with " the everlasting need to build a system, a 'gnosis' that accommodates man to the extent that he becomes his own legislator and thus substitutes himself to God's authority"[403]

5.4 HENRY CORBIN SEES HIMSELF IN LINE WITH THE GERMAN CHRISTIAN KABBALISTS

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[401] Henry Corbin, *Hamann, Philosophe du Luthérianisme* (Location: Publisher, year), 55. "Pas davantage que la Loi n'est donnée aux Juifs pour les rendre justes, mais pour nous persuader au contraire combien notre raison est déraisonnable, et que nos erreurs doivent croître par elle."

[402] Corbin, *Hamann*, 57. "De même il faut qu'un génie s'abaisse à ébranler les règles sinon elles restent de l'eau, il faut être le premier à s'y jeter une fois que l'eau est troublée, si l'on veut soi même éprouver l'efficacité et la vertu des règles."

[403] Corbin *Hamann*, 99: "l'éternel besoin d'une réconciliation avec un système, une 'gnose' au sens très large, une accomodation à l'homme, qui finit toujours par se reconnaître les droits d'un legislateur et se substitue à Dieu."

Along with Hamann's Lutheran philosophy of religion, Henry Corbin is indebted to the long history of Christian Kabbalists. This debt is very clear in the *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*, the small booklets in which the conferences held in this para-Masonic institution created by Corbin have been published. For instance in the first cahier, Corbin writes:

> Is it acceptable that we can not find the existence of a home in which the "interiorists" of the different "communities of the Book" can pursue the work of the Christian Kabbalists such as George of Venice or FC. Oetinger?[404]

In the fourth volume, Corbin explicitly declares that his will is to unite the various Jewish, Muslim, and Christian "Kabbalists," who have never worked together in past centuries.[405] The fifth volume represents the proceedings of the last session in which Corbin took part. He died a few months after the conferences published in this volume. In his last speech, Corbin quotes the Catholic theosophist Franz von Baader, who happens to be the mentor of the Catholic Kabbalist Franz-Joseph Molitor, as saying " I illustrate my question by appealing to the great theosopher Franz von Baader"[406]

If Lutheran theology and the Christian Kabbalist traditions are the grounds upon which Corbin builds his own philosophy of religions, how do these two traditions affect his intepretation of Islamic spirituality, especially Ibn 'Arabī's teachings?

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[404] *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jérusalem.* Ed. Henry Corbin, Vol. 1, Sciences Traditionelles et Sciences Profanes, ed. Henry Corbin (Paris: Berg International, 1975), 10. "Est-il acceptable qu'il n'existe aucun foyer ou' les "intérioristes des diverses 'communautés du Livre' puissent aujourd'hui reprendre ensemble à pied d'oeuvre la tâche des Kabbalistes chrétiens de jadis, depuis un George de Venise jusqu'à F.C Oetinger? (…) nous voulons reprendre à pied d'oeuvre un effort resté en suspens, semble-t-il, depuis ceux que l'on a appelé les "Kabbalistes Chrétiens."

[405] *Cahier de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 4, *Les Pèlerins de l'Orient et les Vagabonds de l'Occident* (Paris: Berg International, 1978), 8.

[406] *Cahier de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 5*, Les Yeux de Chair et les Yeux de Feu: La Science et la Gnose* (Paris: Berg International, 1979), 142.

5.5 CORBIN AND IBN ʿARABĪ: ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK *L'IMAGINATION CRÉATRICE DANS LE SOUFISME D'IBN ʿARABĪ*

Corbin's book on Ibn ʿArabī, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn ʿArabī*, was published in 1958 by Flammarion, a different publishing house from the one that promoted Guénon's works (i.e., Gallimard). Gallimard launched a collection of books entitled *Tradition*, in which Guénon's books are printed. However, Corbin's book appears in the collection *Idées et Recherches*, which was led by one of the most brilliant French poets of the twentieth century, Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016).

The book is divided in two parts. The first chapters deals with spiritual states that indicate the attraction by which terrestrial beings and celestial beings come to share a mutual interest in each other. Corbin then postulates a priori that "mysticism" is a state of mind in which one experiences the "pathetic god" (*Dieu pathétique*). Corbin argues that this specific mystical experience encompasses the "supraessential God" and the "theophanic God": "Toute la question est de savoir si une théologie mystique de la suressence est exclusive de l'expérience d'un Dieu pathétique."[407]

Once Corbin has stipulated a priori that this should be any form of mysticism's main feature, he attempts to find in Ibn ʿArabī the modalities by which his assertions can be illustrated.

Corbin's first comment on Ibn ʿArabī ascribes a belief in a divine drama to the Andalusian Muslim scholar. In this drama, the "deep sadness" of the unknowable god

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[407] Henry Corbin, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn ʿArabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 91.

meets the "nostalgia" of the divine names.[408] For Corbin, the divine names long to express their meanings, but they feel the need to recieve "being" as they are thrown into existence. For instance, if the divine name of "compassionate" has no object toward which it can be compassionate, it nostalgically longs for "being." Corbin then translates "Rahman," which would generally mean "loving, caring God" or "merciful," as "compassionate."

But, from where does Corbin retrieve the idea that divine names have a strong feeling of nostalgia?

This idea belongs to a narrative that Ibn 'Arabī creates to convey the mission of the divine names in their creation. In this passage, all the divine names gathered around the name Allah and "informed him that they are asking the already actual existence (*wujud*) of the heavens and the earth to put each key in the lock of its door."[409] Ibn 'Arabī then comments on this narrative: "all these names make out the cosmos and this cosmos is the most perfect one as in its entirety it manifests the divine name 'the Generous.'" This cosmos is the best possible one because if it was not the most perfect it could not possibly manifest the name "Generous." We see here that Ibn 'Arabī has no sign of sadness or cosmic drama in this narrative, but rather one that invites the reader to joyfully and gratefully experience the world.

In the second part of the book's first half, Corbin sustains the idea that Ibn 'Arabī taught that by being experienced by man, God's existence is sustained by man's own being: "Nourishing God with our being is nourishing God with His own being"[410] Corbin

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[408] Corbin, 94.

[409] Ibn 'Arabī, *La Production des Cercles*, bilingual ed., trans. by Paul Fenton and Maurice Gloton (Paris: Editions de l'Eclat, 1996), 40, translation is mine.

[410] Henry Corbin, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 106 : "Car le nourrir de notre être, c'est le nourrir de son être."

sees in this sentence of Ibn 'Arabī a link to the meal Abraham offered to the Angels, and the sentence thus hints at a famous icon painted by Rublev (1370-1430):

> La philoxénie d'Abraham, le repas mystique offert aux Anges, devient ici la parfaite image de la devotio sympathetica. Comme telle, elle signifie donc pour le mystique en un symbole plastique, le degré de réalisation spirituelle qu'il doit atteindre pour être un khalil, l'intime de son Dieu. Ici alors, nous aurions pu conclure, la tâche d'expliciter la notion aussi caractéristique de l'Homme Parfait, Anthropos teleios, Insan Kamil.[411]

Coming back to Ibn 'Arabī, Corbin here considers the chapter on the prophet Abraham from *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikam*). This chapter is devoted to the mystery by which Abraham, or Ibrahim, becomes the "intimate friend" of God (*Khālil Allah*). In this chapter, we find the following expression: "It is then you who feed Him through the wisdoms/rules (aḥkam)."[412]

In his own commentary on this chapter,[413] Ibn 'Arabī writes that faculties are exchanged between the divine ipseity and man's reality, by which people grasp the relations between God and the world. Ibn 'Arabī then comments on the following famous hadith:

> He who is hostile to a friend of Mine I declare war against. My slave approaches
> Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon

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[411] Corbin, 106.

[412] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abu 'al-Ala Affifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabī, 1980), p.83, paragraphs 6-7. Translation is mine.

[413] William Chittick, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom, Ibn 'Arabī's own summary of the Fusus", *Journal of the Muhidyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* 1 (1982): 1-44 accessed on November 30, 2018, http://www.ibnArabīsociety.org /articlespdf/naqshalfusus.pdf. The words in parentheses are by Jâmi (1414-1492).

him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me, I will surely give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely protect him.[414]

Ibn 'Arabī first notes that the hadith refers first to the canonical or obligatory prayers and secondly to those that are supererogatorious. Through the canonical prayers, men's faculties perceive God's essence beyond any limitations. Through supererogatory prayers, man perceives God and the world from the standpoint of God as He manifests Himself through the devotee's immutable essence.

Ibn 'Arabī writes, "But (the love pertaining to) supererogatory works, (or its result, is) that you hear and see through Him, (in that God is the organ of your perception)."[415]

What is then exchanged is not the nourishment of "being," as Corbin argues in his book, but "perceptions". This exchange of perceptions shows the Sufi a set of preexisting meanings: "So He pervades his faculties and his organs with His He-ness (huwiyyah) according to the meaning which is appropriate to Him."[416]

The quest for a "pathetic god" clearly comes from Corbin's Protestant background and Luther's *significatio passiva*, as presented above. From the start, Corbin transforms Ibn 'Arabī into a Protestant mystic.

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[414] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 327-331.

[415] William Chittick, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," Ibn 'Arabī's own summary of the Fusus, *Journal of the Muhidyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* 1 (1982): accessed on November 30, 2018, http://www.ibnArabīsociety.org /articlespdf/naqshalfusus.pdf. The words in parentheses are by Jâmi (1414-1492).

[416] William Chittick, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," Ibn 'Arabī's own summary of the Fusus, *Journal of the Muhidyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* 1 (1982): accessed on November 30, 2018, http://www.ibnArabīsociety.org /articlespdf/naqshalfusus.pdf. Emphasis is mine.

The first part of the book is constructed so that Corbin reappropriates Ibn 'Arabī to the extent that the Andalusian mystic becomes consonant with the mystical experience Luther had in his youth. For the Lutheran Corbin, it is God's kenosis in Christ's sufferance that transforms the being of God into the human Christ and vice-versa. Corbin's transformation of Ibn 'Arabī is such that where Ibn 'Arabī sees a perfect world, Corbin sketches a world driven by a cosmological sadness. Moreover, where Ibn 'Arabī sees an exchange between God and man of perceptions and awarenesses, Corbin feels a divine empathy between man and God, such that man and God eucharistically exchange the nourishment of "being."

The second part of the book is devoted to the concept of "creative imagination," by which man imagines God and God imagines man and his world: "A l'acte initial du Créateur, imaginant le monde, répond la créature imaginant son monde, imaginant les mondes, son Dieu, ses symboles."[417]

Corbin sees the imaginative faculty as the best organ by which man can know God. Corbin believes that imagination enables man to know the *coincidentia oppositorum* by which opposites are transformed into a third term that overcomes their distinctions. Corbin explains that God's "active imagination" is not a fiction but a reality, writing:

> Illusion qualifies imagination only when it becomes opaque, when imagination
>
> looses its transparency. But, imagination becomes truthful when it reveals God
>
> and then imagination frees us [of our terrestrial belonging]. This occurs when

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[417] Ibn 'Arabī, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 146.

imagination carries out the function, assigned to it by Ibn ʿArabī himself, of making the oppposites unite: coincidentia oppositorum. [418]

The imaginative vision becomes the third term by which the opposites are gathered in a same reality. Corbin's concept of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is not found in Ibn ʿArabī's writings but in Hamann Christology, as shown above.

Aydogan Kars[419] has brilliantly proven that Ibn ʿArabī does not reason in terms of opposites but rather articulates dualities that are seen as "two daughters that come from the same father." This is to say they manifest a common source from which they both emanate, but this same source simultaneously marks the irreductible difference between their respective identities. A later interpreter of Ibn ʿArabī, the Senegalese Ibrahīm Niasse (1901–1975), named the knowledge of the opposites as the knowledge of the "impossible form." Here, the Sufi contemplates the junction of God and the world but does not fill the central void with any image, concept, or symbol. Ibrahīm Niasse confirms this point of view by saying: "It is known that the Real, Exalted is He, and the world are two opposites, yet they are brought together without incarnation, without unification or delimitation," [420] and in another passage he adds that this occurs "without any unification [ittiḥad]."[421]

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[418] Corbin, 146 : "La qualification d'illusoire ne peut convenir qu'au cas où se chargeant d'opacité, l'Imagination perd toute transparence. Mais quand elle est vraie de toute la réalité divine qu'elle révèle, elle est libératrice, si nous reconnaissons en elle la fonction que lui reconnait Ibn ʿArabī et qu'elle seule assume: Une *coincidentia oppositorum.*"

[419] Aydogan Kars, "Two Modes of Unsaying in the Early Thirteenth Century Islamic Lands: Theorizing Apophasis through Maimonides and Ibn ʿArabī," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol.74 (December 2013): 261-278.

[420] Ibrahīm Niasse, *Kāšif al-Ilbās ʿan fayḍa al-ḫatm Abī al-ʾAbbās* (Cairo: Shaykh Tijani Cisse, 2001), 188.

[421] Ibrahīm Niasse, *Kāšif al-Ilbās ʿan fayḍa al- ḫatm Abī al- ʿAbbās* (Cairo: Shaykh Tijani Cisse, 2001), 171; Imam Cheikh Tidiane Ali Cisse, *What the knowers of Allah have said about the knowledge of Allah,* Bilingual version English/Arabic (Atlanta: Faydabooks, 2014), 89 in English, 91 in Arabic.

This spiritual insight entails that the Sufi contemplates the opposites from the standpoint of the unsymbolizable "empty middle" that separates them. It is this "empty middle" that must remain empty or unsymbolisable of which Qūnawi has written:

> Know that the most perfect and complete knowledge is correspondence [mudāhāt] with the knowledge of the Real. No one gains it save him whose essence is empty of every attribute and imprint [naqsh] and who settles down in the Exact Middle of the Greatest Point, which brings together all levels and existent things.[422]

A second proof that proves that Ibn 'Arabī does not understand the third term as a result of the erasure of the difference between the oppositions in the occurrence of a new third being that rises out of the identities between these opposites, is the following. In a small book, that among all Ibn 'Arabī's writings comes the closest to a philosophical treatise, The Book on the Production of the Circles of Existence, Ibn 'Arabī defines the third thing as that which is "not qualified by existence, nor by non-existence."[423] It is the substratum from which all things are made but in itself it is only a reality made up by the mind of people who are in need of this concept to postulate a relation between God and the world: "It is the reality of all realities of the universal world, and intelligible that exists

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[422] William Chittick, "The Central Point – Qūnawī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, 35 (2004): 26.

From a historical standpoint, the Qūnawi's understanding of oppositions most likely originates in Proclus's philosophy. I give some insights on the relation between Proclus's teachings and Qūnawī's insights in the next chapter, but give here the translation of Proclus's views on oppositions by Stanislas Breton, one of the main French experts of the late Neoplatonist philosopher: "La nature médiane de Psyché équivaut par là même à une copule d'univers. Elle implique la récapitulation de tous les ordres, l'active connexion qui fait communiquer les différents, le moyen terme où se compensent les contraires dans une divine mesotès. On s'aperçoit alors que 'cette plénitude des opposés,' en laquelle les tensions se renforcent et s'harmonisent, est à la fois ce qui résume un monde et ce qui le fait advenir." See: Stanislas Breton, "Âme spinoziste, Âme néo-platonicienne", in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, Quatrième série, tome 71, n°10 (1973), 210-224

[423] Ibn 'Arabī, *La Production des Cercles*, bilingual Arabic/French, ed., trans. by Paul Fenton and Maurice Gloton (Paris: Editions de l'Eclat, 1996),17. Translation from the Arabic is mine.

(only) in man's mind [al dhihn]."[424] This is to say that when two things are brought close, "the connection that happens through their being brings forth another form that is the form of this connection."[425] But this connection's form has no ontological consistency. It is only the product of a mind that has not accepted the middle point's emptiness and thus produces estimative judgments and representations that may help guide people through everyday life but are, ultimately, foreign to the real unity of being.

The second part of the second half of Corbin's book on Ibn 'Arabī develops the argument of the active imagination as the resolution of oppositions by identifying the peak of spiritual realization in the contemplation of a handsome young man sitting on a throne, according to the saying attributed to the prophet Muhammad: "I have seen my lord blessed and most high as a young man, beardless, and on him a red/green garment."

Corbin identifies this vision with the contemplation of the young Christ's images of first-century Christians: "There is in effect a remarquable similarity between the image of the hadith and the vision of the adolescent Christ." [426]

Chodkiewicz showed how this contemplation is imperfect for Ibn 'Arabī as it still has a form. The main Ibn 'Arabī expert explains that the Sufi's purpose is to grasp the pre-created meanings of God's creation and the revelation that they are formless. He writes:

But nothing would be more contrary to Shaykh al-Akbar's thought than to believe that this imaginal world constitutes the nec plus ultra. By insisting on the importance for Ibn 'Arabī of the notion of the 'âlam al-khayâl, Corbin filled a

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[424] Ibn 'Arabī, 18. Translation from the Arabic is mine.
[425] Ibn 'Arabī, 19. Translation from the Arabic is mine.
[426] Ibn 'Arabī, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 211. "Il y a en effet une conformité remarquable entre l'Image du hadith de la vision et l'Image du Christ adolescent"

serious gap in previous studies. By paying too much attention to this discovery,

he was led to overestimate its importance and reduced the field of perceptions of

the divine to the domain of formal theophanies.[427]

In this second part of Corbin's book on Ibn 'Arabī, Corbin implicitly attempts to transform Ibn 'Arabī into a Christian author. First, he applies the *coincidentia oppositorum* doctrine found in Hamann's Lutheran philosophy of religion to Ibn 'Arabī. This prohibits Corbin from acknowledging the power of separation that Ibn 'Arabī gives to the source of all dualities in the expression "the father of the two daughters." Subsequently, Corbin projects a Christian devotion to icons upon a hadith found in Sufi literature, according to which Muhammad told his disciples that he had contemplated God in the form of a handsome young man. What Corbin misses, though, is that Ibn 'Arabī does not see this contemplation as the highest form of divine knowledge the Sufi should achieve in his quest for God's presence. In his spiritual endeavour, the Sufi should grasp the pre-created meanings that have unfolded in the creation—of which he is a part.

Nonetheless, where Corbin clearly departs from Ibn 'Arabī and his school of thought is in his hatred for anything that, in his view, is tied to the law. I show above how Luther opposes the lawgiving God with a God whose grace fills the hearts of Christians. In the writings of Corbin this opposition between two divine aspects becomes close to Guénon's own division of the divinity in a personalized divinity (*Brahma saguna*) and in the unqualified first principle (*Brahma saguna*).

5.6 HENRY CORBIN ON GOD'S REALITY

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[427] Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Vision of God," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī*, 14 (1993): accessed on November 30, 2018, http://www.ibnArabīsociety.org/articles/visionofgod.html.

Henry Corbin, as Guénon and Valsan before him, divided divinity in two: a hidden Godhead and its personalization in the divine face contemplated by the mystic. Corbin's consideration on divinity was present in 1958 in his book on Ibn 'Arabī and creative imagination: "Tout ce qui est manifesté pour les sens est donc la forme d'une realité idéale du monde du Mystère, une face d'entre les faces de Dieu, c'est à dire des noms divin."[428] The more Corbin nourishes his religious philosophy with texts from the Isma'ili tradition, the more he emphasized God's angelic face:

> L'éternellement-être constitue en termes de philosophie ismailienne, la divinité suprême absolument inconnaissable et imprédicable. Mais ce qu'elle est éternellement, en actuant son être, en le révélant, c'est la première hypostase archangélique; sa Personnification eternelle, son Ipséité même, L'Unique qui à jamais en soit révélé. Cet Archange est le Deus Determinatus (*al-Lah*).[429]

The dialectic between God's essence and his face is, for Corbin, given by a "pathetic desire" to be known, experienced, and suffered by the mystic. When the mystic experiences God's desire by contemplating God's face directed toward him, he unites God's essence with God's face: "Car c'est Dieu lui-même, qui, déterminé dans la forme du fidèle, soupir evers soi-même, puisqu'il est la Source et Origine qui aspira justement à cette Forme determinée, à sa propre anthropomorphose." [430]

5.7 HENRY CORBIN ON THE DOCETIC PERFECT HUMAN BEING

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[428] Ibn 'Arabī, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 174.

[429] Henry Corbin, *Temps Cycliques et Gnose Ismailienne* (Paris: Berg International Editeurs, 1982), 44.

[430] Henry Corbin, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Aubier: Paris, 1993), 118

From the above consideration on God's reality, it follows that the mystic who has reached his spiritual perfection has realized the inner dialectic of the Godhead, by which God's essence has manifested itself in an archangelic presence:

On ne rencontre pas, on ne voit pas l'Essence Divine; c'est qu'elle est elle même le Temple, le mystère du coeur, où pénètre le mystique lorsque, ayant réalisé la plénitude microcosmique de l'Homme Parfait, il rencontre la "Forme de Dieu" qui est celle de "son Ange", c'est à dire la théophanie constitutive de son être.[431]

This angelic knowledge of one's spiritual reality is, according to Corbin, present in the docetic currents of Christianity as well as in Shi'a Islam:

S'il est vrai que l'imamologie shi'ite assure assume une fonction analogue à celle de la christologie, du moins faut-il préciser qu'il s'agira plutot d'une christologie de typte angélomorphique, telle qu'on la trouve dans le christianisme primitif. . . . Que l'on veuille bien nous épargner à ce propos le mot de "docétisme" ou plutôt que l'on apprenne à considérer celui-ci comme la première critique pertinente de la connaissance théologique comme telle.[432]

Corbin uses Docetism to refer to a theologumenon by which Christ is not an incarnation of God but an angelic or non-corporeal manifestation of God's reality.

It is unclear who held a similar view of Christ in ancient times. Nonetheless, the nineteenth-century Christian Kabbalist and Martinist, Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860), held a Docetic view on Christ. He understood the incarnation of Christ as a magical projection undertaken by God the Father:

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[431] Corbin, 215.
[432] Henry Corbin, *L'Imâm Caché* (Paris: L'Herne, 2003), 41.

The Father is the infinite will of the universal. The Son is the infinite will of the particularization of the divine. The Son, to appear in the external world of differentiation, negates not only himself but also the Father. .... Though, internally, the Son remains undifferentiated from the Father, identical with the Father. The true external manifestation of the Son is only the external image of the Son, or better said *the magical projection of his inner identity*.[433]

Valsan also openly declared that Docetist Christianity is a more truthful form of Christianity than Christianity's current forms (mainly Catholic and Protestants).

This statement on Docetism belongs to an article in which Valsan defends the Islamic character of Guénon's teaching. In a passage where Valsan apocryphally describes the crucifixion of Christ's apostle Peter, he states that the cross must be understood as a symbol. This symbol makes the world below access the world above and brings what is on the right side in this world on the left side of the world above and vice versa. In this same passage, he defends, although as passing remark, Docetism by stating that no one until now has truly understood the esoteric and true meaning of its doctrines: "Nous ne pouvons pas nous arrêter à l'endroit, pour expliquer ce que pourrait être au point de vue proprement initiatique le 'docétisme' dont on parle toujours sans rien en comprendre."[434]

5.8 CORBIN ON THE ISLAMIC LAW: SUNNISM AS THE BODY OF LAW THAT MUST BE OVERCOME BY THE HIDDEN IMAM

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[433] Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte, oder über die Tradition,* 2:157-158, paragraphs 257-258. Emphasis is mine.

[434] Michel Valsan, "Références Islamiques du 'Symbolisme de la Croix,'" in *Études Traditionnelles*, 424-428 (March-April, May-June and November-December 1971). For a presentation of Henry Corbin's Docetism, see: Daniel Proulx, "Le Parcours Philosophique de Henry Corbin: Phénoménologie- herméneutique et Philosophie Prophétique" (Mémoire de maîtrise: Université de Sherbrooke, 2009), 129- 131.

In all five volumes of the *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jerusalem* published in Corbin's liftime, the "Kabbalists of Islam" are identified with Ismailis and, to a lesser extent, with Twelver Shi'a. How then does Corbin deal with the signifier "Sunnism" in these five volumes?

In the first volume, Sunni Islam's very striking absence constructs a philosophical discourse. This ghostly absence is particularly relevant when Corbin asks who is the right inheritor of the trust God gave to humanity according to the Qur'an (33:72). Corbin answers that the right inheritor is the scholar (savant) who belongs to the Shi'a movement and whose interiority has been illuminated. Corbin writes, "who betrayes the spiritual trust given to the Imams by giving it to the adversary is accountable of high treason"[435] Corbin is not merely presenting ancient esoteric philosophers' thoughts, but is defending his view on the allegiance to the esoteric truth that all the members of l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem should abide to.

Furthermore, Sunni Islam is clearly identified with one who suffocates the spirit by his adherence to the law.[436] In the fourth volume, Corbin explicitly writes that the doctrine of the Verus Propheta (the doctrine that, according to Corbin, goes from early Christianity to Shi'a Islam) is not fully understood by Sunni Islam. According to Corbin, the integral understanding of this doctrine happens most fully in Shi'a Islam.[437] In the fifth volume, Corbin addresses the drama that is essential to the gnostic cosmogonies. Corbin narrates a drama in the inner life of God, according to which the impersonal Godhead must actively

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[435] *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 1, Sciences Traditionelles et Sciences Profanes (Paris: Berg International, 1980), 40 : "le dépôt confié ce sont les hautes connaissances. Livrer le dépôt confié . . . à l'adversaire c'est se rendre coupable d'une haute trahison spirituelle."

[436] *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 4 (Paris: Berg International, 1977), 41-43.

[437] *Cahiers de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 5 (Paris: Berg International, 1978), 178.

reconcile himself with the personal God, a reconciliation that happens in the heart of man. In the time between the final prophet Muhammad and the coming of the Mahdi, through which the cosmological reconciliation happens, lies the choice one must make between the sixth day (the final revelation of Muhammad embodied in a book and a law) and the seventh day (the cosmological reconciliation between God and man through the Imam). People who stay in the sixth day without the ability to look toward the seventh day belong, according to Corbin, to the Sunni group: "Sunnism stops at the sixth day, while Shi'a is the religion of the seventh day." [438] Sunnism and the physical body are destroyed on the sixth day, and both represent the law that needs to be spiritually overcome. On the seventh day, the spirit can rise and the hidden Godhead can be known.

5.9 RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO CORBIN'S LUTHERAN AND MELANCHOLIC THEOPOLITICAL USES OF IBN 'ARABĪ'S NAME

The name of Ibn 'Arabī serves a purpose that is best understood via the conflict between the young Luther and the Catholic Church. He looks inside Ibn 'Arabī's oeuvre for features that might universalize Luther's spiritual experience.

I have proven five means by which Corbin Christianizes/Lutheranizes Ibn 'Arabī:

1. A cosmic drama must have happened such that God's kenosis has become necessary, and by this kenosis God and man share a same affect of sadness. Here, Corbin misses the fact that Ibn 'Arabī views the world as perfect and, totally, as an emanation of the divine name "Generous."

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[438] *Cahier de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*. Vol. 6, *Le Combat pour l'Âme du Monde*. (Paris: Berg International, 1980), 164: "le sunnisme s'arrête ainsi au sixième jour, tandis que le shi'isme est la religion du septième jour."

2. Corbin projects a Eucharistic metaphor unto Ibn 'Arabī's teachings by stating that, according to Ibn 'Arabī, God and man share feelings of sadness and exchange the nourishment of being. The French Orientalist identifies the Perfect Human Being with the being who has spiritually realized a meeting with the Godhead that nourishes man with being, and the man nourishes the Godhead with the being of "His" personalized and angelic face. Here, Corbin loses the fact that, for Ibn 'Arabī, God "feeds" his devotee with perceptions and an awareness of pre-created meanings—not with "being."

3. Corbin ascribes to Ibn 'Arabī the belief in the *coincidentia oppositorum* that he borrows from the Lutheran mystical theology of J.G Hamann, which sees the crucifixion of Christ as the becoming identical of all oppositions: God and the world; life and death. However, Ibn 'Arabī and his later commentators rarely consider a similar identity of oppositions but rather insist on the empty middle that constantly approximates and separates the oppositions without ever erasing them in their center.

4. Corbin identifies the peak of Ibn 'Arabī's mystical knowledge with the contemplation of a young handsome man with the allure of Christ. However, he does not acknowledge that this contemplation is, according to Ibn 'Arabī, imperfect and does not grasp the formless pre-created meanings.

5. Finally, by constructing an Ibn 'Arabī who would have been more inclined toward a Shi'a spirituality than Sunni Islam, Corbin displaces the conflict between Lutherans and Catholics to the Islamic world. He identifies Shi'a Islam

and Lutheranism with spiritual currents that have entirely overcome the law, as embodied by Catholicism and Sunnism.

The drive that moves Corbin's theopolitical uses of Ibn ʻArabī's name is Lutheran and deeply melancholic.

He repeatedly insisted that the relation between the hidden god and man is a relation of "nostalgia." The circular reasoning behind Corbin's philosophy is that the hidden god, in his sadness, breathes the world for his lower divinity to be reunited with himself, one who is, according to Corbin, the highest and most remote divinity. Corbin writes, "A Divine Being Alone in his unconditioned Essence, of which we know only one thing: precisely the sadness of the primordial solitude," and some paragraphs later in the same book says, "and this nostalgia of the divine names is nothing else than the sadness of the unrevealed God that is anguishing in his own occultation."[439]

But is it really nostalgia we find in the words of Corbin, or is it melancholia? The main difference is that nostalgia is the will to go back to the totality of signifiers that were held together by a master signifier. Nostalgia[440] means the faded master signifier that held together all the signifiers of my discourse is no longer capable of doing so. If I say, "Beautiful were the times in which France had a Christian King," I express the idea that the monarchy and its master signifier (the King) are no more and that I am willing to immerse my imagination in this past totality. I more or less accept that the object of love— people gazing at Louis XIV as the supreme ruler even if they suffered social injustice—is no more. Melancholia, however, works differently; it is unwilling to accept that the master

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[439] Corbin, *L'imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn ʻArabī*, 93, 143. Emphasis is mine.
[440] Sylvain Frérot, "La Nostalgie du Père Comme Passion," *Analyse Freudienne Presse* 2, no. 12 (2005): 195-204, DOI: 10.3917/afp.012.0195.

signifier and the object of love that supported its ruling function faded away. This unacceptance that the master signifier has faded away nourishes an aggressive energy that is willing to reestablish the master signifier while trying to erase the object of love. Freud writes, "This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness."[441] The melancholic person has an ambivalent relation to the lost object that is loved and hated at the same time. The third moment in the economy of melancholia is the moment the aggression takes place. Freud finishes his article by saying: "Each single struggle of ambivalence loses the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as if it were killing it".[442]

If mourning enables one to exit trauma, melancholia is traumatic as it repeats the same feature over and over, the destruction of the lost object of love's effects and the desire to reestablish its lost power. In Corbin's discourse, we acknowledge that the passion felt by the divinity and by man destroys the Sunni law while constantly reaffirming the power of the seventh day as the day of the celestial Jerusalem, where the secrets of the hidden God are revealed. But the destruction is never fully done (otherwise Corbin would not feel the urge to continuously subalternize the Sunni in his many discourses), so the disturbance of the law and its effects continuously reappear in his discourses. Nevertheless, Corbin always looks for mediations and not for the immediate appearance of the celestial Jerusalem. The concepts of "Imaginal" and the "Angel" function here as mediations between God and man. These oppose the intellectualism and legalism of his perception of Sunni Islam as engulfed in matter and darkness. Through Corbin's

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[441] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 14 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 243-258.
[442] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 14 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 243-258.

melancholia, Sunni Islam cannot be mourned, only approached. Mediations establish the delay and prohibit the final destruction of the sixth day from being fulfilled. Mediations here delegitimize Sunni Islam and its law, destroying it without entirely erasing it. This recalls what Freud expressed as the ambivalence seen at work in the discourse of the melancholic patient. Corbin's metaphysics are melancholic and not nostalgic precisely because something, Sunnism, continuously reappears and hinders the seventh day's full victory over the sixth day. Melancholy simultaneously pushes Corbin toward always a new rearticulation of his metaphysical contemplations.

6. IBN 'ARABĪ'S NAME LOST IN THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE OF A MODERN HERMETIC RELIGION, A POPULAR SPINOZIST EPISTEME AND ULTRAMONTANE POLITICS (GAUTHIER, DE LIBERA)

6.1 RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITIES OF THE FRENCH PERENNIALIST EPISTEME

All the authors analyzed in this dissertation establish a philosophy of religion that needs to be practiced in a set of liturgical rituals. From the 1930s on, Guénon probably practiced Islamic and Sufi rituals; Valsan led Islamic prayers, Sufi rituals, and brought some of these back from his trips in Tunisia; and Corbin carried out various Masonic rituals in his later years. Moreover, these religious philosophies all belong to a common polemical field with strong borders.

Is their set of fundamental beliefs identical to the religiosity they perform?

The science of religion was structured, until recently, between those who defend a substantial definition of "religion" and those who defend a functionalist definition of this

concept. François Gauthier's[443] article on religion and religiosities offers a helpful theoretical view that moves beyond this dichotomy.

A substantialist approach would look for a definition that translates the contextual performances that the actors perceived as religious. Gauthier gives the example of Weber, who defines religion as the rules by which men interact with supranatural powers. The problem of a similar approach is that it cannot account for the religious experience made by those who watch a soccer game or attend a show by the singer Alice Cooper or the great Wu-Tang Clan.

The functionalist approach, on the other hand, looks for a definition of "religion" that applies in every cultural and social context. For instance, Durkheim sketches an understanding of "religion" that is not made by individuals but is an expression of the totality of society.

"Religion" is here defined as activities by which society produces a sense of cohesion and togetherness. The problem of a similar approach is that it may understand as religious any collective action contravening in this manner to the fundamental idea that "religion" only exists as long as there is a separation between "sacred" and "profane".

Can we move beyond these two definitions?

Gauthier's approach is based on differentiating three levels of "religious" performances: macro, meso, and micro. The macro level regards all relations a society has with its absolute otherness and its foundation. This macro level is made of all assertions that are implicit and rarely explicit in discourses or teachings.

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[443] François Gauthier, "Religieux, Religion, Religiosité" *Revue du MAUSS* 1, no. 49 (2017): 167-184.

Inside an Islamic frame, especially one informed by Ibn 'Arabī's spirituality, the word "religion" might reify an identity between "dīn"[444] and "religion" that has been used by Muslims only since the 19th century,[445] or since when Islamicate worlds began to perform, via the Naḥḍah movement presented in this dissertation's third chapter, a way of living in connection with God in a way that suits the whiteness[446] of the colonizer's gaze. As there is no word for "religion" in an Islamic context, the macro level of "religion" sketched by Gauthier would rather translate as the "*minhāj*"[447], or the global methodology by which a Muslim derives his creed and practical actions from the Qur'an and the Sunna.

If we turn back to our French Perennialist scholars, the macro level sketched by Gauthier traces the borders of the polemical field that includes Guénon and Corbin. It refers to basic assumptions that make them feel part of a common intellectual atmosphere. The undiscussed fundamental beliefs shared by Guénon and Corbin are:

1. The truthness of a perennial wisdom that is found in various traditions that can easily be compared between each other.

2. The capacity of Mason and Sufi rituals to bring the initiate to the intuitive knowledge of the hidden God and beyond the personal face of the latter (i.e., the lesser divinity or the second god).

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[444] The word "dīn" carries the following meanings: 1. Authority, Ruling and Having Charge; 2. Obedience and Submission Due to Subjugation; 3. The Method and Means of Life; 4. Punishment, Reward and Judgment; see Mahmoud Khatami, "The Religion of Islam," *Religious Inquiries* 1, no. 1 (Winter and Spring 2012): 67-80.

[445] Ali Ghandour, *Die Theologische Erkenntnislehre Ibn 'Arabīs* (Berlin: Editio Gryphus, 2018), 20.

[446] *Medium.com* (blog); "Whiteness, Religion and Modernity," by Malory Nye, posted August 28, 2018, accessed on December 31, 2018 from https://medium.com/religion-bites/whiteness-religion-and-modernity-64729dc21e8e.

[447] Adis Duderija, "Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: The Neo-Salafi Manhaj," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (January 2010): 75-93.

3. As I have shown in the beggining of the subchapter on Guénon's Neo- Hinduism, Guénon and Corbin believed that the heart of the primordial tradition is Hyperborean.[448]

These three beliefs belong ultimately to modern Hermeticism, which borrows from the medieval belief in a universal secret that is delivered to initiates who tread the spiritual path, regardless of their religious belonging. However, modern Hermeticism adds to this medieval belief the quest for an initiation that would bring the esoteric disciple immediately into the occult world.[449] I have widely proven this point in the chapter on Valsan. Valsan reorganized Guénon's article in the book he edited, *Symboles de la Science Sacrée*, so the reader can access immediately (*d'un seul coup d'oeil*)[450] the hidden metaphysical order of things. I have proven how Valsan constructs a meta level of truth above what he labels Islamic exoterism by identifying the Islamic figures of Idris, Hermes (refers to Christian Hermeticism), and Enoch (refers to Freemasonry).

This quest is the modern aspect of Hermeticism that establishes the macro level of "religion," or the "*minhāj*" of French Sufi Perennialists.

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[448] See 2.5.1 Neo-Hinduism in the chapter on Guénon. A deeper analysis of this aspect of the polemical field would lead us astray. With regard to this belief see: Henry Corbin, *L'homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris: Présence, 1971), 65: "*les Hyperboréens symbolisent l'homme dont l'âme a atteint une complétude et une harmonie telles, qu'elle est sans négativité ni ombre; elle n'est ni de l'orient ni de l'occident*". René Guénon, Symboles de la Science Sacrée (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 95: "*le symbole de la Balance polaire est en rapport avec le nom de Tula donné originairement au centre hyperboréen de la tradition primordiale*". A historical contextualisation of this esoteric-Nazi belief has been brilliantly undertaken by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarck, *Hitler's Priestess, Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo- Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 37-39.

[449] Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 138.

[450] Michel Valsan, "Introduction aux Symboles Fondamentaux de la Science Sacrée," Science Sacrée, accessed December 30, 2018, http://www.sciencesacree.com/medias/files/5.-introduction-aux-symboles-fondamentaux-de-la-science-sacree-michel-valsan-n-special-rene-guenon-de-la-revue-science-sacree-2003-.pdf. This introduction is not in the later editions of the book: "d'un seul coup la totalité d'un trésor intellectuel d'une exceptionnelle richesse."

Gauthier then moves on to the meso level of religion, which includes all practices that seek a way to become institutionalized. An institution can be a church or a carnival organized by laypeople every year. In Islamic terms, this would be the ʿaqīdah, or creed, of a group of persons who identify as Muslims and thus teach the explicit beliefs that singularize their collective existence from other Muslim groups. For instance, a book ascribed to Ibn ʿArabī, but probably not written by him, is entitled *Beliefs of the Elite Among Mankind, from a Rational and a Spiritual Perspective*.[451] This attempt of establishing a creed is a performance by which a group of Muslims enacts a desire to give the foundation for an institutionalized practice. What kind of activities performed by the Perennialist scholars in this dissertation belong to the meso level of "religion"? We would find Mason or Sufi rituals and texts in which Valsan defers to Islamic dogmas and laws. Finally, Corbin's private communications in which he insisted he was foremost a "Protestant theologian"[452] also show the meso level of his religious self-understanding.

Gauthier sees in "religion's" micro level all activities by which a devotee narrates his religious experiences inside a biographical trajectory. In an Islamic-Sufi context, this level refers mostly to the epistolary genre in which a Sufi shares his spiritual insights with a disciple or friend on the path. With regard to the Perennialist scholars in this dissertation, this refers to the narratives by which they construct the self-identity of a spiritual master, with its supranatural powers and enthusiast discourses.

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[451] Roger Deladrière, forward to Ibn ʿArabī *La Profession de Foi*, trans. Roger Deladrière (Paris: Sinbad, 1985).

[452] Steven D Foster, "The Angels, Excerpts from the Writings of Henry Corbin and Tom Cheetham," in *The Departing Landscape*, accessed on July 12, 2018: http://thedepartinglandscape.blogspot.com/2010/11/the-angels-part-iv-text-excerpts-corbin.html: "Corbin in his maturity always presented himself as a Protestant Christian."

As shown in the first chapter, when answering questions from British Freemasons, Guénon signs with his Islamic name and dates his text with the name of an Islamic feast to indicate that the impersonal character of his teachings have been realized in a specific place and time. He does this in a journal published by Freemasons and thus wants to be known to embody the Perennial and "impersonal" tradition in an Islamic context.

Furthermore, when Valsan presents himself as an Islamic scholar and Guénon's heir, he enacts the micro level of religion by conveying an image of himself as the carrier of an impersonal and universal truth inside Islam's eschatological tradition.

Moreover, when Corbin shares his strong enthusiasm, motivated by his discovery of Freemasonry's birthplace in Scotland, he constructs a narrative of being elected by supranatural powers.

On a macro level, Perennialists abide by a modern Hermetic religion. On a meso level, they set into motion this modern Hermetic undiscussed belief by practicing Sufi or Masonic rituals and being perceived as truthful to a general religious institution, such as al-Azhar University for Valsan or the historical Protestant churches and Freemason institutions for Corbin. Finally, the micro-level religion consists of their narrations of their spiritual transformations and serves to build the public image of a spiritual master endowed by supranatural powers.

6.2 HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF THE FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALIST EPISTEME

Nonetheless, the historical foundation of the French Sufi Perennialist episteme remains unanswered. Alain de Libera established a strong methodology to answer a single question: When a philosophical question is asked in two historical times, why does it receive two different answers? In another words, why is the coherence found between an

answer and a question that belong to a same historical era judged incoherent in another historical time? This methodology[453] gives tools to examine the construction of coherence in a philosophical text and compare it with other constructed senses of coherence.

According to De Libera, a philosophical text's coherence comes from four elements. The first consists in the unquestioned certainties that shape the absolute assumptions on which the texts develop arguments. De Libera names these the "*presuppositions absolues*," upon which an episteme is grounded and a metaphysician begins his teachings[454].

Furthermore, he postulates that a question and answer belonging to the same sense of coherence and the same historical era must satisfy three requirements:

1. Any question or answer must be pertinent or appropriate; it must "belong" to the whole text and to the specific place in which it is found.

2. Any question must already have been asked more than once.

3. An answer to a question must be accepted by a community of philosophers as a possible answer to the question it wishes to answer. Each philosophy builds a test of coherence by which it repeatedly joins the "correct" answer to the "correct" question in a same manner.

6.2.1 FUNDAMENTAL UNQUESTIONABLE AXIOMAS

These three elements are implied in any activity by which a scholar of a specific historical era judges if the answer given to the philosophical question is coherent with it or not.

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[453] Alain De Libera, *L'Art des généralités* (Paris: Aubier, 1999), 624; see also R.G Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), chap. V.
[454] Alain De Libera, *L'Art des généralités* (Paris: Aubier, 1999), 635.

As stated above, Corbin, Guénon, and Valsan share a set of fundamental assumptions that can be labeled "modern Hermeticism":

1. The truthness of a perennial wisdom that is found in various traditions that can easily be compared between each other.

2. The capacity of Mason and Sufi rituals to bring the initiate to the intuitive knowledge of the hidden God and beyond the personal face of the latter (i.e., the lesser divinity or the second god).

3. The belief that the heart of the primordial tradition is Hyperborean.

6.2.2 WHAT IS THE MAIN PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM GUÉNON WISHES TO ANSWER?

In his 1909 text "Le Démiurge," Guénon asks: How is it possible to experience evil knowing that God is perfect? However, this initial question is only a pretext to a more fundamental question repeatedly found across all his writings: How is it possible for the limitless infinite to emanate the limitations of the things experienced in this world's oppositions?

Le Tout est nécessairement illimité, car, s'il avait une limite, ce qui serait au-delà de cette limite ne serait pas compris dans le Tout, et cette supposition est absurde . . . mais alors, puisqu'il n'y a qu'un Principe unique, que deviennent toutes les oppositions?[455]

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[455] René Guénon, "Le Démiurge," in *La Gnose* (1909) republished in René Guénon, *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 10.

Written in his youth, this text shows Guénon's first attempt to convey the fundamental ideas of his oeuvre.[456] It is published in the occultist journal *La Gnose* from the Eglise Gnostique Universelle, of which Guénon was a member in his youth.

This question on the relation between the limitless whole and the determinations found in existence is the real leitmotiv of Guénon's books. Furthermore, it is the bulk of his book *Le Principe du Calcul Infinitésimal*. Guénon'essay has two aims. The first is to distinguish the "true" infinity that cannot receive any determination or limit from the indefinite, which is the capacity for anything quantitative to be cut into two or more pieces.[457] The second aim is to explain, through the philosophy of mathematics, what Guénon names the "passage à la limite,"[458] or the jump by which a limited being becomes suddenly aware it has always been identical with the "true" Infinite.[459]

6.2.3 WHAT IS AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION THAT GUÉNON JUDGES AS COHERENT WITH HIS GENERAL PROBLEM?

The sentence that synthesizes the passage from the perception of limitations to the awareness of the "true infinity," is the following:

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[456] Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Le sens caché dans l'oeuvre de René Guénon* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1975), 54.

[457] René Guénon, *Les Principes du Calcul Infinitésimal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 17: "c'est pourquoi nous regardons comme fondamentale, dans toutes les questions où apparaît le prétendu infini mathématique, la distinction de l'Infini et de l'indéfini."

[458] Guénon, 136: "La limite n'appartient donc pas à la série des valeurs successives de la variable; elle est en dehors de cette série, et c'est pourquoi nous avons dit que le "passage à la limite" implique essentiellement une discontinuité. S'il en était autrement, nous serions en présence d'une indéfinité qui pourrait être épuisée analytiquement, et c'est ce qui ne peut pas avoir lieu."

[459] Guénon, 191: "En effet, la limite, étant par définition une quantité fixe, ne peut, comme telle, être atteinte dans le cours de la variation, même si celle-ci se poursuit indéfiniment; n'étant pas soumise à cette variation, elle n'appartient pas à la série dont elle est le terme, et il faut sortir de cette série pour y parvenir. De même, il faut sortir de la série indéfinie des états manifestés et de leurs mutations pour atteindre l' "Invariable Milieu," le point fixe et immuable qui commande le mouvement sans y participer, comme la série mathématique tout entière est, dans sa variation, ordonnée par rapport à sa limite, qui lui donne ainsi sa loi, mais est elle-même au delà de cette loi. Pas plus que le passage à la limite, ni que l'intégration qui n'en est d'ailleurs en quelque sorte qu'un cas particulier, la réalisation métaphysique ne peut s'effectuer "par degrés"; elle est comme une synthèse qui ne peut être précédée d'aucune analyse, en vue de laquelle toute analyse serait d'ailleurs impuissante et de portée rigoureusement nulle."

le centre apparaît bien comme le point le plus intérieur de tous, mais, dès qu'on y est parvenu, il ne peut plus être question d'extérieur ni d'intérieur, toute distinction contingente disparaissant alors en se résolvant dans l'unité principielle. C'est pourquoi Allah, de même qu'il est le « Premier et le Dernier » (El-Awwal wa El- Akher), est aussi « l'Extérieur et l'Intérieur » (El-Zâher wa El-Bâten), car rien de ce qui est ne saurait être hors de Lui, et en Lui seul est contenue toute réalité, parce qu'Il est Lui-même la Réalité absolue, la Vérité totale: Hoa El-Haqq.[460]

First, Guénon affirms the existence of oppositions that are later erased by one who has reached the center: "Once in the center, there is no exterior, nor interior." For one who has integrated with the center of his being, his being itself erases the distinctions and "he is the Absolute Real, the total Truth." In other words, he is no longer affected by the limitations and thus embodies the true infinite. His essence expresses the *whole* of its nature, with which *his being is identical:*

> Tandis qu'une liberté relative appartient à tout être sous quelque condition que ce soit, cette liberté absolue ne peut appartenir qu'à l'être affranchi des conditions de l'existence manifestée, individuelle ou même supra-individuelle, et devenu absolument "un," au degré de l'Être pur, ou "sans dualité" si sa réalisation dépasse l'Être. C'est alors, mais alors seulement, qu'on peut parler de l'être "qui est à lui-même sa propre loi," parce que cet être est pleinement identique à sa raison suffisante, qui est à la fois son origine principielle et sa destinée finale.[461]

For Guénon, the correct answer to this question adheres to three requirements:

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[460] René Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'Ésotérisme islamique et le Taoïsme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 36.
[461] René Guénon, *Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1984), 106.

1. Acknowledgement of oppositions that shape the limits experienced in this world.

2. Erasure of their differences to achieve the knowledge of the limitless, the true infinity.

3. Affirmation of the identity of these oppositions and thus full erasure of the limitations—in other words, of their singularities.

6.2.4 How are we then to historically characterize the fundamental question of Guénon?

We need to separate our search for the historical foundation of Guénon's questioning from the historical foundation of the answers given by him to the general question that structures his thoughts.

The fundamental question for Guénon is foremost a Spinozist one. This is what I intend to prove in the following lines. By relying on two articles on the differences between Spinoza and Proclus[462], I show how Guénon's main question is foremost Spinozist. In a second moment, I sketch the trajectory of popular Spinozism that forms the soil on which Guénon displays his philosophy. To achieve this I need to distinguish a modern form of Neoplatonic Hermeticism from a premodern one. Furthermore, if as Sedgwick suggests[463] that both Guénon and Ibn 'Arabī belong to Neoplatonism, do both also belong to the same interpretation of Neoplatonism?

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[462] Proclus (412-485) was the last, strictly speaking, Neoplatonist philosopher to offer a systematic view of the world. He was surrounded by an empire that was intensively becoming Christian and where the cult to the "old" gods was decaying. For an overall presentation of Proclus' philosophy, see Lucas Siorvanes, *Neo-platonic philosophy and science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996). On the Arabic reception of Proclus, see Gerhard Endress, *Proclus Arabus. Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der Institutio theologica in arabischer Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden: Steiner 1973).

[463] Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20.

The following paragraphs compare Spinoza with Proclus' Neoplatonism for two reasons. First, Todd[464] has proven that Proclus' theology heavily influenced Qūnawī's Sufism. Second, Marcia Hermansen has indicated how speculative Sufism[465], finds its roots in Proclus' writings.

The main difference between classical Neoplatonism, Proclus especially, and the modern one inaugurated by Spinoza lies in the different interpretation of the power of negation. For Spinoza, the negation is a determination that affirms God's attribute of thought or of extension. Spinoza's metaphysics is thus a metaphysics of the fullness of being in which, according to the specialist of Neoplatonism Jean Trouillard,[466] every negation is perceived as an affirmation of God's attributes, i.e. thought or extension. On the contrary, for premodern Neoplatonism, such as expressed by Proclus, a negation is the power by which it denies even the knowledge that it gains from its denying x. It is a double negation that is not transformed in any affirmation. Which of these two uses of negation is present in Guénon's work?

Guénon quotes Spinoza's sentence twice "*omni negatio, determinatio est*"[467] so as to guide the reader toward a contemplation of the wholeness of being. This is best shown by the following quotation of Spinoza made by Guénon:

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[464] Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 62-63.

[465] Marcia Hermansen, Shah Wali Allah's Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (Lata'if): A Sufi Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47 (1), 1988, 1-25: "*In arriving at a three-tiered model, Shah Wall Allah may have been influenced by Neo-Platonic and Sufi traditions. A tripartate model was used by Proclus, for example, who developed Aristotle's concept of the pneuma as a way to explain how the incorporeal, eternal soul can become attached to the body. Among the Sufis, Al-Hujwirl (d. 1071) depicts the person as composed of three levels; Spirit (ruh), Lower Soul (nafs), and Physical Body (jasad).*"

[466] Jean Trouillard, "PROCLOS ET SPINOZA", in *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'Étranger* 172, no. 2 (1982): 435-48. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41093343.

[467] René Guénon *L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Vêdânta* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1925), 159, footnote 3; René Guénon, *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 25 footnote 2.

Nous avons dit cependant qu'une chose particulière ou déterminée, quelle qu'elle soit, est limitée par sa nature même, mais il n'y a là absolument aucune contradiction; en effet, c'est par le côté négatif de cette nature qu'elle est limitée (car, comme l'a dit Spinoza, «omnis determinatio negatio est»), *c'est-à-dire en tant que celle-ci exclut les autres choses et les laisse en dehors d'elle, de sorte que, en définitive, c'est bien la coexistence de ces autres choses qui limite la chose considérée*; c'est d'ailleurs pourquoi le Tout universel, et lui seul, ne peut être limité par rien.[468]

For Guénon and Spinoza, the limits of a manifested thing excludes from its properties those of another thing[469]. This is not the case for Proclus. In Proclus' Neoplatonism, the difference between things are perceived not in terms of non-shared properties but rather in terms of sharing in different intensities the original negativity by which the Ineffable One negates to its derivatives any participation in the very being of its Essence[470]. This same negation is the power by which each derived essence constitutes itself as a unity, as a soul that affirms its difference from the Ineffable One, as well as from the plurality of existing things[471].

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[468] René Guénon, *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 25, footnote 2. Emphasis is mine.

[469] Jean Trouillard, "PROCLOS ET SPINOZA", in *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'Étranger* 172, no. 2 (1982): 435-48: "Au-delà de la négativité des corps qui souvent s'entrempêchent et s'excluent, de celle des intelligibles présentée par Platon dans le Sophiste et évoquée par Spinoza dans la formule omnis determinatio negatio, le néo-platonisme introduit une négativité radicale et originelle."

[470] Jean Trouillard, "PROCLOS ET SPINOZA", in *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'Étranger* 172, no. 2 (1982): 435-48.

[471] Stanislas Breton, Âme spinoziste, Âme néo-platonicienne, in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, Quatrième série, tome 71, n 10 (1973), 210-224. This can easily be compared to Ibn 'Arabī's teachings on the market of the forms. In the afterlife, Ibn'Arabi believes that those who have gained the supreme bliss will be able to choose their own bodies in the "market of forms" and thus slip from a body to another body. See William Chittick, Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn 'Arabī Eschatology, in *The Muslim World*, vol.

Trouillard thus distinguishes the way Spinoza and Proclus understand "determinations" and makes it the heart of the modern transformation of Neoplatonism. For Spinoza, the negation of a negation shows the affirmation of God's Essence, while for Proclus, the negation of a negation is the negation by which even the knowledge that is given by the assertion "x is not z" is denied. The power of the negation is transformed by Spinoza in the act of overcoming the imperfect character of the knowledge of the thing that is denied, while for Proclus it becomes a power by which an essence self-constitutes itself by repeating the fundamental gesture by which the Ineffable One equally transcends all that is affirmed of it and all that is denied of it. The original negation by which the One transcends all other unities that derive from it is also the negation that these reemploy to establish their own unity in front of the plurality of all that is existentiated. On this topic Proclus writes, "The one is identical with nonbeing, this is to say that the one is identical with what is grasped through the negation"[472].

Proclusian use of negation comes close to the understanding of the universal Muhammadan spirit by Ibn 'Arabī and his early modern revivalists Ismā'īl Haqqī (1653- 1725) and 'Abd al-Ghani Nabulusi (1641-1731). In fact, for the Akbarian theology, the intermediary between God and man is foremost the Spirit of Muhammad. The Muhammadan spirit is the first thing created. It is both existent and non-existent, one and non-one. Ismā'īl Haqqī comments the following verse of the Qur'an 33:21[473]:

> In truth, in (the sacred person of) Allah's Messenger (blessings and peace
>
> be upon him) there is for you a most perfect and beautiful model (of life)

78, Issue 1 (January 1988), 51-82.

[472] Proclus in Parmenid VI, 1081, 10-11, quoted and translated by Jean Trouillard, *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclos* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres: 1972), 8.

[473] Translation by Muhammad Tahir ul qadri.

for every such person that expects and aspires to (meeting) Allah and the

Last Day and remembers Allah abundantly.

In this commentary he writes:

"The first thing created is my spirit"[474] refers to the archetypal model by which

the spirits of this community are connected and follow the spirit of Allah's

messenger. The spirits of this community are brought forth from nothingness

[*'adam*] to existence [*wūjūd*] after the spirit of the messenger has come out from

nothingness [*'adam*] to existence [*wūjūd*]. They reside in the world of spirits as

traces of Muhammad's spirit[475].

The Muhammadan spirit is both one (being unique) and not-one (being manifested

as a created being it thus belongs to realm of relative nonexistence upon which God's

ipseity reflects itself). 'Abd al-Ghani Nabulusi writes about the first thing created that is

both spirit and light:

The Beloved [*al-ḥabib*] is the one who is loved [*al-maḥbub*], namely, the

Light of Muhammad, which is *the first creation* by His light in the sense

that it is the first *nonexistent* differentiation and potential formation. It is, so

to speak, the water of mouth of the eternal Beloved, the moisture on the path

between lips of the drinking friend. [476]

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[474] Ḥaqqī presents this ḥadīṯ without its isnad as something that is already known by all his listeners.

[475] See the commentary of the Qur'an by the 17th revivalist of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī, *Rūh al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 2008) commentary of Qur'an 33:21; retrieved on 12.03.2019 on altafsir.com: https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=3&tTafsirNo=36&tSoraNo=33&tAyahNo=21&tDisplay=yes&Page=2&Size=1&LanguageId=1. Translation of the meaning of this passage is mine. Emphasis is also mine.

[476] Shigeru Kamada, Nabulusi's commentary on Ibn Al Farid's Khamriyah, in *Orient* vol. 18 (1982), 19-40. Emphasis is mine.

Nabulusi thus interprets the Spirit of Muhammad as being both the first creation (e.g., something that exists) and the first nonexistent thing that is different from God's ultimate reality.

Spinoza's modern use of negation is in the backyard of Guénon's philosophy of religion and thus strongly differs from the premodern uses of negation by Proclus and the school of Ibn 'Arabī (Qūnawī, Ismā'īl Haqqī, 'Abd al Ghani Nabulsi). Is it possible to argue that the thoughts of Guénon are organized in such a way that they mirror the teachings of Spinoza? If this should be the case, then not only Guénon's fundamental question is Spinozist, but we get even closer to the historical knowledge of the general episteme to which Guénon's philosophy belongs.

Piero di Vona has defended the idea that "Spinoza has probably influenced the structure of Guénon's oeuvre"[477]. He traces four strong similarities between these authors:

1. For both of them, it is by an "intellectual intuition," that man can regain the Edenic state of being where the intellect by which this intuition is gained is seen as being one and universal. This intuition brings a knowledge of God.

2. For both of them, the essential prerequisite for liberation from illusions is the awareness of the perfect idea of God. For Spinoza, this means to have a clear understanding of the idea of God that slumbers in man's mind. Spinoza equates this perfect idea of God with the "spirit of Christ" and refuses any theology of incarnation. For Guénon, the perfect idea of God is the advaita vedantin "Self" (Soi) and can be gained only by a "synthetic intuition." This

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[477] Piero di Vona, Spinoza e Guénon, in *Archivio di Filosofia* 46, 1 (1978), 333-355.

expression was precisely used by a contemporary scholar of Spinoza, Léon Brunschvicg, who coined this formula to designate Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, the *scientia intuitiva*. Moreover, Guénon's idea of the "Self" is identical to the *Ipse* of Judah Leon Abrabanel (1465-1523), a Jewish scholar whose ideas have partly influenced Spinoza's thoughts on the equation between the *scientia intuitiva* and the *amor Dei intellectualis* (intellectual love of God).

3. For both of them, after one is liberated, he is intuitively aware of himself, God, and all the things. This awareness is given by a contemplation of their identity from an eternal standpoint.

4. For both of them, once the wise man has achieved the intuitive knowledge of God, *his nature necessarily manifests the Essence and thus extends over all that is not the Self*. Di Vona writes:

When Guénon says that the Self must be considered "sous l'aspect de l'éternité et de l'immutabilité qui sont les attributs necessaires de l'Etre pur," he refers to the contemplation sub specie aeternitatis of Spinoza . . . for whom the laws of nature are immutable and thus show the infinity, eternity, and immutability of God.[478]

This conception is modern and not present in Proclus' Neoplatonism: "According to Spinoza, liberation consists in unfolding spontaneously the whole power of nature. According to Proclus, liberation consists in being free from nature or in establishing

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478 Piero di Vona, Spinoza e Guénon, in *Archivio di Filosofia* 46, 1 (1978), 333-355.

one's own nature"[479]

In other words, for the Spinozist and Guénonian wise man, the negation and limitation is overcome by the identity of his mind/intellect with the mind/universal intellect of the Self or first principle. Differently, for the Proclusian wise man, the negation is a trace of the Ineffable One. This trace is then very identical with the negation through which I constitute the unity of my soul by negating anything that is not itself.

Entering in greater detail into these four aforementioned points would lead us astray. However, it is the fourth point that is the most important one, as it confirms Trouillard's exposition that Spinoza (and thus also Guénon's that derives his ideas from Spinoza) conception of the determination and limitation is a modern and unedited one.

Di Vona argues that for Guénon and Spinoza:

Infinity is the most positive idea that exists, but nonetheless it can be

expressed only in negative terms. The negation of a determination or

of a limitation is the negation of a negation and therefore a positive

affirmation. This is then why the negation of any determination is

equal to the most absolute and total affirmation.[480]

Guénon belongs to a Spinozist episteme. This episteme's understanding of negation is foreign to Proclus' Neoplatonism. Moreover, it is most probably also foreign to premodern Islamic scholars such as Qūnawī and his early modern heirs, Isma'il Haqqi and Abd al-Ghani Nabulusi.

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[479] Jean Trouillard, "PROCLOS ET SPINOZA", in *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'Étranger* 172, no. 2 (1982): 435-48. "Pour Spinoza, la liberté consiste à déployer spontanément toute la puissance de sa nature. D'après Proclos, elle consiste à être affranchie de toute nature ou à se donner à soi-même sa nature."

[480] Piero di Vona, Spinoza e Guénon, in *Archivio di Filosofia* 46, 1 (1978), 333-355.

6.2.4.1 "POPULAR SPINOZISM" AND THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF THE FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALIST'S EPISTEME

In which spiritual context did Guénon encounter the work of Spinoza? According to Piero di Vona[481], it was the book *The Temple of Satan* written by Stanislas de Guaita (1861-1897), one of the early occultist companions of Guénon that offered him an occulitistic approach to Spinoza's philosophy. Moreover the popular occultist mage Papus, in whose para-masonic lodges Guénon was introduced to an eclectic set of esoteric ideas, also lists Spinoza among those who knew the "real" Kabbalah[482].

I do not claim that Guénon derives his philosophy and spiritual quest from Spinoza's books or from the occultist interpretation of his philosophy. In fact, Guénon stated in 1928, "it is an aberration to think that Spinoza might have been a Kabbalist. In fact Spinoza wrote that 'the higher speculations have nothing to do with the Scriptures'"[483].

Instead, I do claim that the general question and thus the orientation of Guénon's spiritual quest belongs to the cloud of narratives that have formed "popular Spinozism," which Michiel Wielema[484] described as the ultra-Lutheran movement led by Pontiann van Hattem (1645-1706) and Jacobus Vershoor (1648-1700). They sought to oppose

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[481] Piero di Vona, *René Guénon e la Metafisica* (Borzano: Sear, 1997). This book is unavailable. I have benefited from the book review by Walter Catalano, retrieved on 14.12.2018: http://www.gianfrancobertagni.it/materiali/reneguenon/divonametafisica.htm.

[482] Papus, *La Kabbale (tradition secrète de l'Occident), Résumé Méthodique* (Paris: Georges Carré Editeur, 1892), 157: "*Spinosa a beaucoup étudié la Kabbale et son système se ressent au plus haut point de cette étude*"

[483] Marie-France James, *Ésotérisme et christianisme. Autour de René Guénon* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions latines, 1981), 293. "par quelles aberrations certains ont voulu présenter comme un kabbaliste le philosophe qui a écrit que à son avis ' les hautes spéculations n'ont rien à avoir avec les écritures"

[484] Michiel Wielema, Spinoza In Zeeland: The Growth And Suppression Of 'Popular Spinozism (C. 1700-1720), in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700* (Leiden, Brill, 1995), 103-115.

Luther's *significatio passiva* and theology of the cross against the official Lutheran Church that they saw as beholding to a last residue of "popery," i.e. the belief that man can be justified by his actions. Wielema synthetizes their ultra-Lutherian theology with these words:

> According to Van Hattem, the atonement achieved through Christ's death has freed us from the law, so that true worship consists in letting God take over our imperfect selves or "nothings" through Christ, and so make us mergeinto the Divine Absolute. We must be felt to be nothing, while God becomes our all. When we have reached this level of understanding, the concepts of good and evil, sin and retribution lose their meaning, since they have no existence in God. The true church consists of all those who have been united with God. For them, neither finite reason nor the literal meaning of Scripture can be used to settle matters in religious disputes.

It is in the circle of the disciples of Van Hattem that "Popular Spinozism" develops as a conviction that God's eternity is immanent to all things and that its most perfect idea is enclosed in any religious form. One of the closest disciples of Van Hattem, the shoemaker Marinus Boom (d. 1728), studied Spinoza's ideas by attending the lessons given to him by the physician Dr. Bliek in a mill. His enthusiasm for Spinoza became stronger than his master's to the extent that Bliek reported that Boom was "a proud little fool" who would be unwilling to give up his newly acquired knowledge.

Boom's idea of God was the following:

I believe that God necessarily brings about everything, in accordance

with the perfection of his nature   All God's works happen in God,

and all his effects exist in Him, not outside Him. And although God is

omnipresent, He is not present as matter to matter, but as an infinite

active force that sustains everything and without which nothing could

exist for a moment. As necessarily as the perfect Being loves His own

Perfection, He also wills that which reveals it, and as necessarily as He

wills it, as freely does He will it   The creation is the result of a

free, unchanging and eternal will. Consequently, I hold that created

things are necessary for God, and not contingent.

We recognize here the marker of modern (Spinozist) Neoplatonism, i.e. God's essence, necessarily manifests all of its nature[485] that distinguishes it from the Neoplatonism of Proclus that stands behind Qūnawī's speculation, for whom the One emanates first of all a negation that becomes the very fuel of each one of its derivatives. For Bloom as well as for Guénon, freedom of the perfect being follows the inner necessity for the perfect being to reveal itself. It is not a freedom that is more fundamental than the instantiation of being but rather a consequence of how being is. We should here be remindful of Guénon's sentence that closes his treatise Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre:

Tandis qu'une liberté relative appartient à tout être sous quelque condition

que ce soit, cette liberté absolue ne peut appartenir qu'à l'être affranchi des

conditions de l'existence manifestée, individuelle ou même supra-

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[485] Jean Trouillard, "PROCLOS ET SPINOZA," in *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'Étranger* 172, no. 2 (1982): 435-48.

individuelle, et devenu absolument «un», au degré de l'Être pur, ou «sans dualité» si sa réalisation dépasse l'Être. C'est alors, mais alors seulement, qu'on peut parler de l'être «qui est à lui-même sa propre loi», parce que cet être est pleinement identique à sa raison suffisante, qui est à la fois son origine principielle et sa destinée finale[486].

Moreover, the 19th century Docetism of Molitor that indirectly informs Valsan and Corbin's non-corporeal Christology (see subchapter 5.7 Henry Corbin's Docetic Perfect Human Being) can also be traced back to Spinoza's own Christology.

In fact, Spinoza distinguishes "Christ according to the flesh" from "Christ according to the Spirit." Spinoza condemns the first formula as being a residue of "Jewish superstition." Moreover, Spinoza distinguishes Paul from the other apostles as he has made a clear difference between Christ according to the Spirit and Christ according to the flesh. Spinoza goes further and identifies Christ-according-to-the-spirit with the Infinite Intellect. The scholar of Spinoza, Yitzhak Melamed, writes on Spinoza's Christology:

> Earlier I suggested that Spinoza's true biblical hero was none but Paul, to whom Spinoza frequently ascribed many of his own philosophical views. This topic deserves a study of its own, but since it is closely related to the current topic, let me point out two crucial texts. In the eleventh chapter of the TTP, Spinoza writes: "None of the apostles engaged with philosophy more than Paul who was summoned to preach to the gentiles while the others, who

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[486] René Guénon, *Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1984), 106.

preached to the Jews, the despisers of philosophy, likewise adapted themselves to their minds (See the Epistle to the Galatians 2 XI etc.), and taught a religion devoid of philosophical theory. How happy our age would surely be, were we to see it also free from all superstition."(…). It turns out that according to Spinoza there seem to have been only two true Christian believers who conceived of Christ according to the Spirit (i.e., the infinite intellect), and not according to the flesh (the resurrection). These were Paul and Spinoza himself[487].

However, it is not clear whether Boom believed that the perfect "Spinozist" idea of God was enclosed in the core of every existing confession or if this belief was ascribed to him by his opponents. How then, historically speaking, has Popular Spinozism become a synonym for a modern universalist understanding of Sufism?

The first French translation of Spinoza's Ethics is written by Henri de Boullanvillier (1650-1722) and circulates in the hands of a wide public around 1730. Its main idea is not strictly found in Spinoza's texts but is ascribed to him. Boulainvilliers defends the existence of a single divine and eternal substance from which all things are only eternal modes of existence: "L'étendue infinie et la pensée, assemblées avec d'autres attributs infinis ne sont pas autre chose que des modes de l'être Unique, Eternel, Existant par lui-même."[488] De Boullanvilliers has also written a history of the life of Muhammad. In this biography of the prophet of Islam, he attacks Christianity and its

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[487] Ytzhak Y. Melamed, "Christus secundum spiritum," in *The Jewish Jesus*, ed. Neta Stahl (London: Routledge, 2012), 140-151

[488] Geraldin Sheridan, Aux origines de l'Essai de Métaphysique du Comte de Boulainvillier: Le Korte Verhadneling, in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700* (Leiden, Brill, 1995), 321-332.

institution and opposes to it the natural intellectual religion of the Arabs that has been sadly deformed by their passions[489]. He then puts Islam as the most perfect religion over all other religions and seems to equate pantheism with an "Oriental wisdom."

Furthermore, as soon as 1758, the French encyclopedist Francois-Marie de Marsy (1714-1763) identified Sufism with the belief of those Muslims who interpret the Qur'an allegorically, those who practice an exoteric faith so as not to trouble the public sphere, and furthermore believed in the "Universal Being" that can be compared with "Spinoza's God"[490].

6.2.4.2 FROM POPULAR SPINOZIST'S MODERNISM TO PERENNIALIST'S ANTIMODERNISM

It seems at first sight that popular Spinozism was an accelerator of modernity. Why is it then the case that Guénon pushed an anti-modern, counterrevolutionary agenda?

Guénon's dispraisal of Protestantism[491] that sees Luther as a subaltern agent of a secret organization that has been manipulated by German princes and rulers[492] has to be located in his political fascination for Catholic ultramontanist tendencies from the second half of the 18th century onwards[493]. The young Guénon and his forefathers (Franz-Joseph

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[489] Forward by F. Collona d'Istria to Spinoza, *Ethique,* trad. inédite du comte Henri de Boulainvilliers; publ. avec une introd. et des notes par F. Colonna d'Istria (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1907).

[490] Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 104.

[491] René Guénon, *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 25.

[492] René Guénon, *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, Éditions Véga, 1964) 89.

[493] This is particulary true for Martinism, as I have presented in the chapter on Guénon. This Esoteric para-masonic teachings have been founded in the 18th century by the Catholic, and probably former Jew, Martines de Pasqually (1727-1744) that lie behind the Freemasonry praticed by the originator of French Perennialism, Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860) as well as behind the lodges in which the young Guénon experienced a spiritist contact with an authority that, in his own views and those of Valsan, belonged to the "universal tradition" beyond all formal traditions. About de Pasqually, Guénon writes: "*D'autre part, beaucoup ont pensé que Martines était Juif; il ne l'était certainement pas de religion, puisqu'il est surabondamment prouvé qu'il était catholique; mais il est vrai que, comme le dit M. van Rijnberk, «cela ne*

Molitor, Franz von Baader, Joseph de Maistre) all perceive Catholicism as the "form" that has the political power to preserve the universalist (or, as we have seen, from a historical point of view "popular Spinozist") teachings of the primordial Adamite knowledge in the West. Rome has such a power because, they believe, the Pope beholds in his hands the spiritual and political power, the access to the greater (the intuitive knowledge of the Self in and through Its manifestation that is identical to the sacerdotal power) and the lesser mysteries (the intuitive knowledge of the Self without Its manifestations that is identical to the royal power). Guénon writes:

> Cela montre bien que cette influence n'appartient pas en propre au roi, mais qu'elle lui est conférée par une sorte de délégation de l'autorité spirituelle, délégation en laquelle, comme nous l'indiquions déjà plus haut, consiste proprement le «droit divin»; le roi n'en est donc que le dépositaire, et, par suite, il peut la perdre dans certains cas; c'est pourquoi, dans la «Chrétienté» du moyen âge, le Pape pouvait délier les sujets de leur serment de fidélité

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préjuge en rien de la question de race»" (see René Guénon, *Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage, tome 1* (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1971) 68).

Molitor, Franz von Baader and Joseph de Maistre for whose teachings Guénon had a lifelong fascination (see René Guénon, Un projet de Joseph de Maistre pour l'union des peuples, in *Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage, tome 1* (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1971, 19-30), were all involved in the commentary of Martines de Pasqually's book *Le Traité de la Réintégration des Êtres* (1770) and in ultramontanist politics, i.e. a political militancy in favor of the absolute spiritual and political superiority of the Pope over the secular government of the nations. See especially Eugène Susini, *Franz von Baader et le romantisme mystique* Vol I-III (Paris: Vrin, 1942) as well as Franz von Baader, *Les enseignements secrets de Martinès de Pasqually* (Paris, Bibliothèque Chacornarc, 1900): accessed on 21.09.2016: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k681383/f6.image.

Molitor saw the function of Freemasonry as the one that carries with it the esoteric teachings of the primordial Christianity in a time in which the Catholic Church started to take on its shoulders the task to not only spiritually educate its believers but also the princes and kings of its countries. Concerning Molitor's involvement with Martinism, Biggemann writes: "*This third volume presents Molitor's theology of punishment that Molitor as a Martinist takes from Kabbalist and Talmudic sources. For the highly conservative Christianity that emerged in the Biedermaier period, the Kabbalist interpretation of the purity Laws of Judaism offered a cultural history based argumentation that relied on the figures of the victim, the punishment and the worship*" (see Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Geschichte der Christlichen Kabbala, teil 3, 1660-1850* (Berlin: Fromann-Holzboog, 2013) 422.

envers leur souverain. D'ailleurs, dans la tradition catholique, saint Pierre est représenté tenant entre ses mains, non seulement la clef d'or du pouvoir sacerdotal, mais aussi la clef d'argent du pouvoir royal; ces deux clefs étaient, chez les anciens Romains, un des attributs de Janus, et elles étaient alors les clefs des «grands mystères» et des «petits mystères», qui, comme nous l'avons expliqué, correspondent aussi respectivement à l'«initiation sacerdotale» et à l'« initiation royale»[494].

The same assumption can be found in Molitor's interpretation of political Catholicism that sees it obligatory for Christian kings to be spiritually and politically subject of the Pope. Molitor writes, "Christ had to establish an external form to show his authority (…). Simon Peter alone is the cornerstone upon which Christ builds his church." [495] In the fourth volume we read, "From the worldy Rome" the Catholic Church expanded and gathered different people. "The Roman church established a 'new, Christian, Roman Empire (…) that brought local governors (fürsten) from their original petty grade to the majesty of their new rank (as they have become Christian Kings)."[496]

To delve further in this topic of counterrevolutionary Catholic esotericism would lead us astray, as our main focus is on the philosophical episteme of Guénon's thoughts and not foremost on the historical roots of his political antimodernism.

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[494] René Guénon, A*utorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, Éditions Véga, 1964), 65.

[495] Franz-Joseph Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte, oder über die Tradition,* vol. 4 paragraph 107, 103-105.

[496] Molitor, vol 4. paragraph 106, page 103.

The fundamental question of Guénon belongs to the field of popular Spinozism from which, according to Sedgwick[497], originates since the 16th century modern interpretation of the opposition between esotericism and exoterism as well as the identification of Sufism with an esoteric universalist core found in a plurality of religious traditions.

Guénon, as Joseph de Maistre and Franz von Baader before him, combined then the early 18th century ultra-Lutheran tendencies of popular Spinozism that look for the immanent presence of an undetermined Godhead inside different confessions with a quest to find inside the ultramontanist Catholic Church (or another religious exoteric "form" that would carry on its shoulders a similar theopolitical function e.g., the caste system in the Hindu traditions, a Neo-hermetic Sufism in which the esoteric Pole of Sufism would rule over the cosmos as well as over the spiritual élite of all nations), an universalist esoteric core. The fundamental popular Spinozist question of this whole Perennialist philosophy is then: *How from an undetermined universal being do multiple determinations appear?*

6.2.4.3 DOES CORBIN SHARE GUÉNON'S FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION?

Does this fundamental popular Spinozist question also set the direction of Henry Corbin's thoughts? In a lesson given in Iran shortly before his 1977 departure to France, Corbin wishes to answer those Guénonian ideas that were popular among scholars of the "esoterical Orient." He entitles his speech "De la théologie apophatique comme antidote

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[497] Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism* (Oxford: Oxford Universtiy Press, 2018), 102-105.

du nihilisme."[498] He attacks Guénonian scholars, particularly the philosopher George Vallin. In his view, they are nihilists, as their quest is for the impersonal God and thus inevitably carries a sense of hatred against the limits of one's personality. They are thus incapable of grasping the power by which from the *urgrund* (the most original foundation of being) rises the limitations of the epiphany of the personal God that as an epiphany of the source of the Godhead leads to the knowledge of this same suprapersonal Godhead.

> La théologie apophatique a justement la vertu de nous préserver de toute
>
> confusion entre l'Absolu et le Dieu personnel, entre l'indétermination de
>
> celui-là et la nécessité de celui-ci. . . .. C'est dire ainsi que la personne
>
> divine, la forme personnelle du Dieu personnel, n'est pas elle-même
>
> l'absolu originaire; elle est le résultat éternel d'un processus éternel dans
>
> la divinité. Mais comme résultant éternellement d'un processus éternel,
>
> elle est à la fois dérivée et originaire. Si l'on médite ce secret, on
>
> comprendra que le personnalisme n'est nullement la source du nihilisme.
>
> C'est inversement la perte de ce personnalisme, l'échec et l'avortement de
>
> la personne qui nihilise son ontogenèse. Eo ipso, le transpersonnel ne peut
>
> pas être conçu par la pensée humaine comme ontologiquement supérieur
>
> à la forme personnelle de la divinité et du moi humain.

The difference then between Corbin's approach and the one followed by Guénonian scholars regards only the orientation of their quest. However, both belong to the same episteme. Corbin experiences the undetermined source of the Godhead in the

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[498] Henry Corbin, De la théologie apophatique comme antidote du nihilisme, in Amiscorbin.com, retrieved on 11.12.2018: https://www.amiscorbin.com/bibliographie/de-la-theologie-apophatique-comme-antidote-du-nihilisme. Emphasis below is mine.

determination of its epiphanies, while his adversaries move from the determinations of the beings to the indetermination of the hidden Godhead:

> Donc, tout se trouve inversé: ce n'est pas le Dieu personnel qui est une
>
> étape vers la Deitas, vers l'Absolu indéterminé. C'est au contraire cet
>
> Absolu qui est une étape vers la génération, la naissance éternelle du
>
> Dieu personnel.

The leading question of Corbin is still the same as the one that has organized and oriented the thoughts of Guénon: How is the indeterminate known by the one who is embodied in his limitations? In this sense, we can only emphasize again that Corbin belongs to the same polemical field initiated in the 20th century by Guénon, which is traced back to 16th century popular Spinozism.

6.3 HOW ARE WE THEN TO HISTORICALLY CHARACTERIZE WHAT GUÉNON BELIEVES TO BE THE "CORRECT ANSWER" TO THE GENERAL QUESTION (LEIBNIZ'S FASCINATION FOR FREEMASONRY)?

For Guénon, a "correct" answer to this popular Spinozist question sees in the *coincidentia oppositorum* its perfect expression. This answer, as I have shown in chapters two and four, does not belong to the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī nor to those of Qūnawī. It is a modern hermetic one that Guénon borrows from Leibniz's *Dissertatio de Arte combinatoria* (1666). In fact, while defining the ether as the substance from which all oppositions are made, he writes in the footnote:

> Dans la figure placée en tête du Traité *De Arte Combinatoria*
>
> de Leibnitz et qui reflète la conception des hermétistes, la
>
> «quintessence» est figurée, au centre de la croix

des éléments (ou, si l'on veut de la double croix des éléments et des qualités), par une rose à cinq pétales, formant ainsi le symbole rosicrucien.[499]

Although Leibniz knew that the Rosicrucian society was a fraud, he believed that its aim of achieving a universal science through a wide use of analogical thinking was a noble purpose that men should achieve. The combinatory art of joining letters and numbers to undiscover the universal language behind the natural languages was an activity undertaken by Freemasons in England and Sweden in the early 17th century under the influence of their readings of Raymond Lull's *Ars magna* (1309)[500].

To the fundamental question that has a strong Spinozist taste, Guénon's answer that he feels as being "correct" belongs to the epistemé of the early 17th century. More specifically, it borrows from the 17th speculation a strong interest in the epistemological use of the coincidentia oppositorum.

In this era, Freemasonry and esoteric societies were in a quest for a universal wisdom that was beyond the particularities of the different known faiths that were in constant conflict with each other, i.e. foremost Catholicisim and Protestant churches, but also the rediscovery of Judaism by those Marrano Jews who had arrived in Amsterdam and left Christianity.

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[499] René Guénon, chap. La Théorie des Cinq Elements, in *Etudes sur l'Hindouisme* (Paris: Etudes Traditionnelles, 1968), 51.

[500] Marcia Keith Suchard, Leibniz, Benzelius and Swedenborg, the Kabbalistic roots of Swedish illuminism, in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, eds. Allison P. Coudert, Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 95-105.

6.4 HOW ARE WE THEN TO HISTORICALLY CHARACTERIZE THE TEST OF COHERENCE OF GUÉNON'S GENERAL EPISTEME: POST-SABBATIAN EPISTEMOLOGIES

The test of coherence for Guénon lies in the capacity of a thought to find inside a set of non-European words a way to close them inside a form that is circumscribed by a law. The law *determines* then the contours of this religious or spiritual form. Inside this law the thought must find an essence that hints, through the process of the *coincidentia oppositorum* (Law vs. undetermined Universal), toward the *non-duality of the First Principle from which necessarily all things are emanated* and that is beyond all closed forms and traditions. If a thought is capable of doing this movement, then and only then Guénon and his heirs judge it as correct. The dialectic that I have here presented simply restates the conclusion of the chapter on Guénon as well as the subchapter on his conception and conceptual use of the revealed law[501].

From where does this epistemology come from?

The sabbatian[502] antinomian tendencies that have influenced first Molitor's Martinism and later Guénon's inheritance of Molitor's traditionalism change the Christian Kabbala epistemologies of the Renaissance. It is no more the task of the Christian (Franz-Joseph Molitor) or later the French Sufi Perennialist to convince the Jews that their law hints toward Christ, but rather it reifies their law so as to construct a universal that is both inside the Jewish law and above as well as outside of it. This is the point I wish to defend in the following paragraphs.

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[501] See 2.7.3 René Guénon on the Law.

[502] Sabbateism refers to the figure of Sabbataï Tzevi (1626-1726), who declared to be the Jewish Messiah. The comunity of Döhnme in the Ottoman Empire practiced a form of Judaism inspired by his teachings.

Wolfson has written an article on the epistemological strategies used by the Sabbatian Jewish convert to Lutheran Christianity Johann Kemper (1670-1716). Kemper attempted to prove that both the Zohar and the Halakah point toward the Christian Trinity and Christ's incarnation. The action by which a spiritual tradition is given the shapes of a form to find inside it something that hints toward its overcoming without thus erasing spiritually its existence is, according to Wolfson, a Sabbatian trend that has become widely diffused in 19th and 20th century Freemasonry.

Johann Kemper (1670-1716), after being deluded by the Sabbatian leader Zadok of Grodno, converted to Lutheran Christianity. He implied that the truths of his new faith are present in the Jewish Kabbalah:

> The dialectic of Sabbatian spirituality is based on a reversal of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, *for a thing is both itself and its opposite* . . . It is precisely this dialectic that best captures Kemper's approach. On the surface his goal was to convince both Jews and Christians that rabbinical and kabbalistic literature contains allusions to the secret of Christianity . . . Beyond this aim, however, is another one that is somewhat more subtle and daring: The nomian tradition itself preserves the hints that point towards the truth of the Christian faith. Ostensibly the latter surpasses the former, *but from the esoteric perspective, which is provided by the Kabbalah in particular, even the halakhah comprises the mysteries of Christianity*[503]

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[503] Wolfson, *Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper*. Emphasis is mine.

Johann Kemper reifies Judaism as a whole with strong contours to which he ascribes the limits of the Jewish law. In a second moment, he shows how the inner core of Judaism is Christianity itself and vice-versa. All the differences are overcome in a final gesture by the fundamental identity between opposites. This is the reason why he needs Judaism to exist as such and does not look to its complete erasure but rather as an entity of which he has fixed its limits and that hints toward the secret he ascribes to the universality of Christianity.

This sentence shows that Guénon's approach that looks at the oppositions that structure a "traditional form" for the self-identity of the first principle that overcomes their difference in the extension of its universality is akin to a Sabbatean-Christian Kabbalistic interpretation of religions.

Inside the juridic contours he has sketched of a given tradition, Guénon finds an essence that hints toward the universal undertermined self that is known by a universal tradition (of which, at the end, only Guénon knows the mechanics of its universality) that informs all closed traditions. The difference here from previous Christian Kabbalists is that the inner core of the non-European traditional "form" is no more Christianity hidden inside a never entirely superseded Judaism, but the "Universal Tradition" (this is to say Guénon's metaphysics as exposed in *L'homme et son devenir selon Vedanta*) itself from which Christianity is only an emanation.

I have also mentioned above that Brach and Wasserstrom[504] both argue that Guénon's esoteric speculations find their forefather in Molitor's philosophy of religion.

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[504] Jean-Pierre Brach, "Paul Vulliaud (1875-1950) and Jewish Kabbalah," in *Kabbalah and Modernity. Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi & Kocku von

Molitor's own Christian Kabbalistic views are highly depended on the form of Jacob Frank's neo-Sabbatism[505] taught him by Ephraim Hirschfeld (1758-1820) and Moses Dobruška alias Junius Frey (1753-1794). In his article, Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als Ästhetisches Paradigma published in 1998, Andreas Kilcher writes about Molitor's Kabbalistic inheritance of Hirschfeld and Dobruška's Kabbalistic interpretations: "The horizon of the frankist spiritual movement enabled them to overcome the rigid frontiers of Judaism by transforming the latter in a Christian-Theosophic direction."[506]

The table below synthesizes the three currents that shape the most generalizable episteme of French Sufi Perennialism.

Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 129-150; Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton Unviersity Press, 1999), 40.

[505] Jakob Frank (1726-1791) thought the be a reincarnation of Sabbatai Tzevi. The God of the Talmud is the demiurge that rules the forms of the different religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Since the times of the Bible the twin brothers Esau (who stands for the people in exile in the lower world we live in and more specifically for Christians) and Jacob (who stands for the true Israel ruled by the true hidden God) have not managed to meet again. Through Jacob Frank they will meet again and the religious forms will be superseded. Esau has, since Sabbatai Tzevi, reappeared in the world to bring forth the spirit hidden in and oppressed by all these formal religions (Judaism, Catholicism and Islam). The task of each Frank's community is to bring to light the hidden core of the existing formal religions. The word formal is important here as the Law is not understood anymore as a power that hints towards a moral perfection but rather as an empty frame that needs to be filled with different exchangeable contents that hint towards a same metaphysical truth. After Sabbatai Tzevi's body, Esau appeared in the body of Baruchiah Russo, also called Osman Baba, and finally in the body of Jacob Frank.The eschatological spirit that will come forth will enable Jacob Frank and his disciples to overcome the power of the demiurge and walk into the court of the Hidden God that awaits them. To prepare this walk, a royal State has to be prepared for those Jews who follow Jacob Frank. Living in this court on earth will enable them to bring forth the feminine spirit (incarnated in Jacob Frank's daughter, Eve) that will unite his disciples with the full appearance of the Hidden God. See: Jacob Frank, *The Collection of the Words of the Lord*, ed. and trans. by Harris Lenowitz, 2004. Accessed on the 07.03.2015: https://archive.org/stream/TheCollectionOfTheWordsOfTheLordJacobFrank#page/n0/mode/2up.

[506] Andreas B. Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als Ästhetisches Paradigma (*Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 250.

		Modern Hermeticism
Leading question	How from an absolute inderteminate absolute are limited things emanated?	18th Popular Spinozism
Leading Answer	Coincidentia Oppositorum	17th Freemasonry and fascination for Lulle's Ars Magna
Test of Coherence	Capacity to reify the external shape of a religious form to retrieve from its center a hint toward the non-duality of the First Principle.	18th Post Sabbateism

6.5 SEXUALIZATION OF JUDAISM AND ISLAM AS THE FUNDAMENTAL DRIVE OF FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALISM

Does the Post Sabbatian test of coherence that brings together a question that is judged as "answerable" with an answer judged as "correct" also explain the drive that moves the waters of French Perennialist philosophies? By drive, I imply here the implicit motivations that push our authors to transform the teachings of the different religions they deal with into something that suits their personal ideologies.

The Post Sabbatian Christian Kabbalist tradition that culturally and historically forges the inner logics of Guénon carries also a deep form of anti-Semitism by which the Semite is transformed by his exoteric and esoteric conversion to Christianity or Islam into a new being that has lost its *femininity* to become a *virile new man*. I intend to prove this point in the following paragraphs by analyzing the function of the word "Shekinah" in Guénon's thoughts. Subsequently, I enter in Valsan's metaphysical exposition to show how he followed Guénon in his anti-Semite refashioning of Jewish and Islamic traditions.

The philosophical question that Guénon answers by explaining the function of the Shekinah in his doctrine pertains to the nature of the celestial intermediaries between the first principle and the individual.[507] Shekhinah (God's 'Feminine' Presence in this world)

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[507] Two were the possibilities that belong to the middle and late Antiquity that Guénon could have implemented in his quest for the identity of the intermediaries. Either he could have followed Numenius' teachings that were influential in the establishment of a Christian Perennialist in the Renaissance and, as I have shown in Chapter 4, influential in Valsan's rendering into French of Qūnawī's Epistle on Orientation, or he could have followed Proclus who in his lifetime strongly differed from Numenius' perspective on the nature of the intermediaries and whose doctrine influenced the form of Speculative Sufism present in Qūnawī's teachings.

Numenius defends the existence of three gods, a First God (also named the Grand-Father) who is inert and absolutely transcendent, a Second God (also named Father) who is the Demiurge, and a third God (also named Grandson) who is the whole sublunear world. The intermediary then between man and the First God happens through the combination of the Second God and the Third God's activities with the emanation of a good soul and an evil soul that is brought forth by the inner division of the Third God in a Dyad that comprehends matter and divinities. See: Carl Sean O'Brian, *The Demiurge in Ancient Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 166-168.

Proclus criticizes such an idea as he believes that the idea that Evil originates from the Demiurge that establishes wholes of unities, would ultimately imply that Evil has a transcendental existence akin to the First God. This hypothesis is wrong, as it would mean that the First God who, for Proclus, is identical with the Good would not have full control over its emanations. But, as Being as such is Good and beyond any opposition that would delimit the unlimited Ineffable One, Evil cannot be its opposite nor a power that weakens it. See: Alain Lernould, *Physique et théologie: Lecture du Timée de Platon par Proclus* (Villeneuve d'Asq: Presses Universitaire du Septentrion, 2001), 255; Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 207.

Moreover, in Proclus' interpretation of the intermediary, the latter is a medium that shows in which ways a *multiplicity partakes in some way to a unity*." See: Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 66. The intermediary shows this relation by being one and also not-one. Hence, it is by participating in the not-one of the medium that the individual strengthens the own unity of his soul by drawing a difference between its unity and its derivatives. Therefore, it is through this medium that she is capable of converting, reversing her particular soul to the knowledge of the Ineffable One from whose act of transcendence the not-one originates as well as her own unity. See: Trouillard, *L'un et l'âme selon Proclos*, 55.

is in his thoughts always coupled with the angel Metatron (i.e. the 'masculine' source of all revelations). Guénon writes: "Les «intermédiaires célestes» dont il s'agit sont la Shekinah et Metatron; et nous dirons tout d'abord que, dans le sens le plus général, la Shekinah est la «présence réelle» de la Divinité."[508]

When the masculine power is identified with Christ, who brings the Shekhina from the centre of his heart to the center among God's people, Guénon writes:

> l'on peut parler de la résidence de la Shekinah, non seulement dans le
> cœur des fidèles, mais aussi dans le Tabernacle, qui, pour cette raison,
> était considéré comme le «Cœur du Monde» . . . En effet, si nous
> appliquons au Christ, en lui donnant la plénitude de sa signification, ce
> qui, en un certain sens et au moins virtuellement, est vrai de tout être
> humain (l'omnem hominem de saint Jean en est la déclaration explicite),
> nous pouvons dire que la «Lumière du Messie» était en quelque sorte
> concentrée dans son Cœur, d'où elle s'irradiait comme

It is important to bear this difference in mind as Guénon follows indirectly Numenius while the akbarian theology has followed Proclus. It is then the Numeniusian theology that allows Guénon to ascribe a religious tradition and identity to the feminine (that he identifies with the Jewish Shekinah or "Hindu" Shakti"[507]) from which the illusion of matter is brought forth[507]. See: René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 55: "*la Shakti . . . nest pas sans présenter certaines analogies avec la Shekinah, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de la fonction «providentielle » qui leur est commune.*"

See also:

René Guénon, *Etudes sur l'Hindouisme* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1968), 102: *Mâyâ est le «pouvoir» maternel (Shakti) par lequel agit l'Entendement divin»; plus précisément encore, elle est Kriyâ-Shakti, c'est-à-dire l'«Activité divine» (en tant que celle-ci est distinguée de la «Volonté divine», qui est chchhâ-Shakti). Comme telle, elle est inhérente à Brahma même ou au Principe suprêm . . . Ceci nous ramène à la question de l'illusion: ce qui est proprement illusoire, c'est le point de vue qui fait considérer la manifestation comme extérieure au Principe; et c'est en ce sens que l'illusion est aussi «ignorance»"*. For Guénon. Matter is brought forth by the Demiurge who presides over the world of the Forms, it is intrinsically "chaotic" and "dark." Furthermore, through gnosis, the guenonian reader overcomes "matter" and the "empire of the Demiurge." See Guénon, Le Démiurge, in *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 9-26. We should be remindful, that Proclus does not see the Demiurge as being intrinsically evil and furthermore does not see matter as being evil. He locates evil in the dissymetry between the parts that compose the soul of the person.

[508] René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 22.

d'un foyer resplendissant; et c'est ce qu'exprime précisément la figure

du «Cœur rayonnant»[509].

The masculine power is even stronger when Guénon deals with the presence of the Jewish "Shekhina" in an Islamic context. For Guénon, the intermediary is the Spirit of Muhammad that he equates with the angel Metatron but only as the latter works in a Dyad[510] with the Jewish Shekhinah. In an article in which Guénon gives a commentary of the Sura 97 Er Ruh (the Spirit), he defines the (universal) spirit as the "instrument through which the whole of existence" is existentiated[511]. In a second moment, he identifies the Muhammadan spirit as a particularization of the universal spirit through which all revelations have been inspired to the prophets and thus as an equivalent to Metatron:

Le nom d'*Er-Rûh* est associé à ceux de quatre anges par rapport auxquels il est,

dans l'ordre céleste, ce qu'est, dans l'ordre terrestre, le Prophète par rapport aux

quatre premiers *Kholafâ*; cela convient bien à *Mitatrûn*, qui d'ailleurs s'identifie

ainsi nettement à *Er-Rûh el-mohammediyah*.

He identifies then the Jewish "Shekhina" with the seat of God's throne. He identifies the Spirit of Muhammad (that he identifies with the Kabbalistic Angel Metatron) with the centre of existence itself seated on the throne:

Er-Rûh est placé au centre, et cette place est effectivement celle de

Metatron; le «Trône» est le lieu de la «Présence divine», c'est-

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[509] René Guénon, *Écrits pour Regnabit* (Milan: éd. Archè, Nino Aragno Editore) 1999, 109-110.

[510] René Guénon, chap. L'Union des complémentaires, in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1996), 61, footnote 9.

[511] René Guénon, A*perçus sur l'Ésotérisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, René Guénon, éd. Gallimard, 1973, 55.

à-dire de la Shekinah qui, dans la tradition hébraïque, est la

«parèdre» ou l'aspect complémentaire de Metatron.[512]

According to Guénon, the masculine Spirit (Islamic Ruh or also the angel Metatron)

is the true center of the throne while the feminine lesser divinity (parèdre, consort[513]) that

is the Jewish Shekhinah is the throne itself.

Furthermore, if we now look for a stronger definition of the Jewish Shekhinah,

i.e. in Guénon's work, this is to say for an equivalent to a notion he ascribes to the

primordial tradition known as Hinduism and presented in his book *L'Homme et son devenir*

selon le Vedanta, then he identifies "Shekinah" with the feminine power of the "Shakti":

> La Shakti . . . n'est pas sans présenter certaines analogies avec la
>
> Shekinah, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de la fonction «providentielle» qui
>
> leur est commune.[514]

What definition does he then give to "Shakti"? Shakti is the "effect of the power of

production by which the qualified Brahma (the personal divinity or lesser divinity) is

produced"[515] and thus always in a state of passivity or at least without an intentional

activity: "c'est-à-dire Sa «Volonté productrice», qui est proprement la «toute-puissance»

(activité «non-agissante» quant au Principe, devenant passivité quant à la

manifestation)."*[516]*

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512 René Guénon, A*perçus sur l'Ésotérisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, René Guénon, éd. Gallimard, 1973, 59.

513 The idea of the Shekhinah being the consort of Metatron is taken from Paul Vulliaud as it can be read in his review of Vulliaud's La Kabbale Juive. See. René Guénon, *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 99.

514 René Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 55.

515 René Guénon, *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vedanta* (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), 219.

516 René Guénon, 106.

In other words, in the work of Guénon, the Jewish tradition is feminine and it is always part of the masculine Christian or Islamic metaphysical reality, without which it cannot reach its perfection. Furthermore, it is tied to the world of production of matter and in an uttmost state of passivity.

The act by which Judaism is feminized and sexualized has been widely studied by Anidjar in his article from 1996, Jewish Mysticism, Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the "Zohar of Christian Spain." In this groundbreaking paper, he defends the idea that Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel's rendering of the Kabbalah obeys an inner logic by which all that is Semitic and Arab-Jewish is transformed through the institution of the field of "Kabbalah studies" into something akin to the good qualities that are projected onto non-Arab Christianity. Among the tools that serve this transformation, the sexualization of Arab-Judaism and the emphasis on the manliness of Christian mystics as well as Sufism plays an important role:

> What does not "fit" in the picture thus drawn, what does not even seem
>
> to resist (to use Paul de Man's term), is a loose configuration that
>
> fluctuates around an "admiration" for manliness/heterosexuality,
>
> Christianity, myth, Greece, and civilization, and a "disgust" for
>
> femininity/homosexuality and the Arabic (though not necessarily the
>
> "high abstractions" of Islam, the "pure" experiences of the Sufis)—a
>
> "disgust" that renders invisible the "children of the East" and the texts
>
> they produced.[517]

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[517] Gil Anidjar, Jewish Mysticism, Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the "Zohar of Christian Spain," in *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1996): 89-157.

In Guénon's treatment of the Shekinah that inherits Sabbatian Christian Kabbalistic hermeneutical procedures, the "high abstraction" of Sufism is the manly power that draws the disciple from the Jewish feminine lesser perfection (the center of one's heart) to the most universal manly perfection (the universality of Being over the whole circle of existence that is identical with the light of the Christian Messiah or the Muhammadan cosmological and eschatological reality). But, in the community of Valsan, is it only Judaism that is sexualised or also Islam?

Paul Fenton has accurately shown how inside the first community of Michel Valsan, many converted from Judaism to Islam. For most of them, Judaism was only a remote memory of something practiced by their forefathers. In some cases, as for instance the translator of the Qur'an Maurice Gloton (b. 1926), Judaism was synonym of the form of Freemasonry practiced by their fathers. This is to say that the Jewish Freemasons had a knowledge of Judaism only through the mediation of the texts written by Freemason Christian Kabbalists about Judaism. He writes, "A high number of Jews were interested in Guénon in a time in which the access to Jewish spirituality and its esotericism was quite difficult to find, especially in French speaking countries."[518]

It is noteworthy that this already happened for Gershom Scholem, who first discovered the Kabbalah through the books of Molitor and continued to hold, even as an elderly person, the work of the Catholic Martinist in great esteem.

Bram Mertens writes that Scholem objected to Molitor's Christologization of the Kabbalah (*Christologischen umdeutungen*) but that "he did not allow this to cloud his

[518] Paul Fenton, "René Guénon et le Judaïsme, in" *René Guénon, l'appel de la sagesse primordiale*, ed. Philippe Faure (Paris: Cerf, 2015): 280.

judgment   on   what   he   considered   to   be   Molitor's   merits."[519]

Interestingly, in the polemical comments made by those who left the cult of Michel

Valsan and his son Muhammad Valsan, we read that aside from the books of

Guénon, those of Gershom Scholem are often read and commented on as part of what

they believe to be the "Tradition."[520]

If this is the general cultural context of Valsan's treatment of Judaism, how is it

reflected in his cosmological expositions?

For Valsan, Jews do not have access to their own center and thus have to look for

it inside the manly Christian or Islamic traditions (i.e., the "gentiles").

Valsan writes, "Another case of a minority that we need to mention regards the

Jewish people in the diaspora. The Kabbalah mentions that the Shekinah is in exile among

the gentiles"[521]

Nonetheless, in the writings of Valsan, Islam is also compared to a "feminine"

presence that is in need of a "viril power." I intend to demonstrate this in the following

paragraphs.

Ibn Kathir's book, *The History of the Prophets*, is quite popular and is not an

esoteric booklet. It is often used to narrate the lives of the prophets of the Qur'an to

children. Regarding the history of Adam and Eve's fall from paradise on earth, Ibn Kathir

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[519] Bram Mertens, *Dark Images, Secret Hints: Benjamin, Scholem, Molitor and the Jewish Tradition* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 79.

[520] *Dossier Schuon* (blog); "Evocation d'un monde the 'mythos,' de jobbard et de 'flippés,'" by Alexandre Palchine, posted March, 9th 2018, page 35: "*chez ceux qui suivent Muhammad Vâlsan: on étudie la Kabbale, surtout les livres de Guershom Scholem.*", accessed on May, 15th 2018: http://dossierschuonguenonislam.blogspirit.com/files/PALCHINE_posterite_de_Guenon.pdf

[521] Michel Valsan, "Les derniers hauts grades de l'Ecossisme, in," *Etudes Traditionnelles* 308 (Juin 1953). "Un autre cas de « minorité » qu'on pourrait citer ici est celui du Judaïsme dans la diaspora, et la kabbale dit que la Shekinah est alors en exil parmi les gentils."

relates the opinion that Adam was thrown out of Heaven and landed in India while Eve landed not far away from Mecca.

Guénon and Valsan see the reunion of this pair in Mecca as the reunion of the primordial (a neo-Hindu interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta) and final tradition (modern Hermetic Islam) in the figure of the "seal of the prophets" Muhammad. Valsan writes,

Adam left India in order to reach Mecca and visit there the divine temple. During his trip, an angel was his companion and thus became his coryphaeus. Each one of his steps (with his gigantic feet) has set a footprint that became a place in which people came to live and develop their culture. Any part of the earth that had not received his footprints became a place of desolation and depopulation. When he stopped at the hill of Arafât, Eve came towards him from Jeddah. She had a strong desire to meet him. They met then at this location that received the name of Arafât on the very day of Arafa (because the root of the verb of these two names suggests that Adam and Eve "knew" each other and thus "recognized" each other on this hill).[522]

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[522] Michel Valsan, "Le Triangle de l'Androgyne et le monosyllabe « Om »,": "Complémentarisme des symboles idéographiques," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 382 (March-April 1964): 77. 2. "Complémentarisme de formes traditionnelles 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* X 383 (May-June 1964): 133. 3. "Complémentarisme des formes traditionnelles 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n.386 (November-December 1964): 4. "Tradition primordiale et Culte axial 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 387 (January-February 1965): 36, and "Tradition primordiale et Culte axial 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 388 (March-April 1965): 83. 5. "« Om » et « Amen » 1 ," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 394 (March-April 1966): 81. 6. "« Om » et « Amen » 2 ," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 395 (May-June 1966): 132. 7. "Inde et Arabie 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 396 (July-August 1966): 218. 8. "Inde et Arabie 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 397 (September-October 1966): 218.

The task of each disciple of Valsan is to transform oneself to become able to grasp the unconditional reality of the supreme self (this is to say the first Alif of the Arabic alphabet and the first letter of the first man's name, Adam).

Eve is a symbol of the manifestation as an external manifestation of the first Alif of *A*dam, the First Principle. This why, he argues, that in Arabic the Alif of Eve (here, Ev*a*) is written at the end of her name. It is a cosmological projection of the invisible, metaphysical Alif of Adam:

"Finally, the upper Alif that is also the first letter of the name of Adam has a 'projection' of itself in the lower Alif, which ends the name of Hawâ (Eva)."[523]

In the philosophical school to which he belongs, the initiate has to first experience that the whole of her senses (Ev*a*) has been enfolded inside his heart, inside the center of manifestation (*A*dam).

Second, the initiate will be able to grasp the identity of the supreme self. The individual's existence then melts into the ocean of the undifferentiated supreme self as the initiate comes to realize that there is no existence except the identity of the supreme self: He has gained the knowledge of Advaita Vedanta, of the first letter of the name of *A*dam. Should the disciple stay on the level of Ev*a* (= Islam), he would not access the masculine Adamite knowledge of the reality (= Adam's Advaita Vedanta) of the supreme self.

In fact, anything else is just an illusion of a mind that has not realized higher mysteries and that naturally produces distinctions where, in reality, according to these authors, there are none.

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[523] Michel Valsan, "Un symbole idéographique de l'Homme Universel (Données d'une correspondance avec René Guénon)," *Etudes Traditionelles* n. 364 (March-April 1961).

We must not distinguish inside the universal, the intellect from knowledge and in a second moment, the intelligible from the knowable: true knowledge is immediate; the intellect is indeed one with its object. It is only in the conditioned modes of knowledge that knowledge is always indirect and inadequate. These conditioned modes of knowledge compel us to establish distinctions for the reason that here knowledge doesn't come from the intellect itself but rather from a refraction of the intellect. As we have seen above, it is a similar refraction that makes out the individual consciousness. However, directly or indirectly, there is always a participation in the reality of the universal intellect.[524]

However, if Eve stands for Islam and Adam for the universal tradition of Advaita Vedanta (India), does this mean that Islam must be dissolved inside the symbolic world of India in the same manner that the cosmological Eve must dissolve herself in the metaphysical reality of Adam?

In his article, *Le Triangle de l'Androgyne*, Valsan elaborates on the relationship between Hinduism and Islam:

If we now take into consideration the structure of these two words Om (A W M) and Amen (A M N), we acknowledge that a same lemma is used. It is made of two elements: A and M. These two

[524] Michel Valsan, "Remarques préliminaires sur l'Intellect et la Conscience," *Etudes Traditionnelles* X (July-August 1962 and September-October 1962): page.

elements belong to the extreme limits of the vocal sound. The first is

its primordial manifestation while the second is its final extinction.[525]

Amen and aum (Om) are distinguished by two distinct sounds. Valsan states that

the sound "w" in Om gives the sense of unfolding the manifestation hidden inside the

supreme self while the sound "n" in the word amen renders the sense of an act of enfolding

the manifestation again inside the supreme self.

Nonetheless, the act of enfolding that is heard inside the sound "n" also implies the

idea of an extinction, of a death to the world of illusions and manifestations, of Ev*a* (= the

lower level of reality but also Islam) inside *A*dam (= the masculine Advaita Vedanta).

This is a clue to understand the reason that, according to his school of thought, the

feminine symbolic world of Islam must be transformed and subsumed in the lights of a

metalevel[526] that best describes the universality of any particular tradition: the masculine

teachings of Advaita Vedanta.

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[525] Michel Valsan, "Le Triangle de l'Androgyne et le monosyllabe « Om »,": "Complémentarisme des symboles idéographiques," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 382 (March-April 1964): 77. 2. "Complémentarisme de formes traditionnelles 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* X 383 (May-June 1964): 133. 3. "Complémentarisme des formes traditionnelles 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n.386 (November-December 1964): 4. "Tradition primordiale et Culte axial 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 387 (January-February 1965): 36, and "Tradition primordiale et Culte axial 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 388 (March-April 1965): 83. 5. "« Om » et « Amen » 1 ," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 394 (March-April 1966): 81. 6. "« Om » et « Amen » 2 ," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 395 (May-June 1966): 132. 7. "Inde et Arabie 1," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 396 (July-August 1966): 218. 8. "Inde et Arabie 2," *Etudes Traditionnelles* n. 397 (September-October 1966): 218.

[526] On the construction of a neo-Hermetic Islam as a construction of metalayers above "exoteric" Islam, freemasonry, and European Hermeticism, see the chapter about Michel Valsan in this dissertation.

The following table displays the ways by which Valsan relates the signifiers that refer to

Eve and those that refer to Adam.

	Mystical geographic place	Tradition	Gender	Degree of reality	Cosmological movement	Does it have the power to rewrite the epistemology of a tradition, or is it rewritten by an external power?
Adam	India	Advaita Vedanta	Male	The first letter, the universal intellect untouched by the oppositions of the cosmos.	Moves from India to Mecca, from what is outside and beyond the closed Islamic form to the center of the world (Mecca) and folds the manifestation back in the reality of the supreme self.	Rewrites the epistemology of what Valsan labels "exoteric" Islam.
Eve	Mecca	Islam	Female	The passive substance, the changing	Receives Adam in Mecca and	The body of Islam; the epistemology of

				cosmos, the world of manifestation.	follows his lead. She is the unfolding movement by which the first principle manifests the cosmos. She is subsequently folded by the power of Adam into the reality of the supreme self, for which Adam is the perfect symbol.	Islam is rewritten by Adam (as a "symbol" of Advaita Vedanta).

7. CONCLUSION: ON THE THEOPOLITICS OF MODERNITY: FOREMOST CHRISTIAN AND HERMETIC OR FOREMOST HERMETIC AND CHRISTIAN?

The study of theopolitics as an academic discipline is the study of how a particular conception of God's sovereignty belongs to a specific episteme.

Modernity is the main conflict that informs the metaphysics of French Sufi Perennialist authors. René Guénon condemns modernity for having transformed all that is

pure quality in a quantitative existence[527] while Corbin condemns it for having established a science of the incarnation of Christ that is foreign to any spiritual knowledge of God.[528] As a result, French Sufi Perennialism has heavily Christianized and neo-Hermeticized the name of Ibn 'Arabī so as to weave together God's Unity with God's law and God's Perfect Human Being against the project of modernity (democracy, pluralism of truths procedures in the public sphere, separation between the church and the state).

Both Guénon and Valsan understand Ibn 'Arabī as a Hermetic author who defends the Martinist and thus Christian idea that the true man who is in the center of the circle of existence must undergo a symbolic bloody sacrifice to attain his spiritual perfection and become one with the existence of the whole surface of the circle. Corbin transforms Ibn 'Arabī into a Lutheran and Christian Kabbalist theologian who upholds a doctrine of the *significatio passiva* and a quest to overcome the dark materiality of the world which he identifies with those religions that are based on the law and rituals (Sunnism, pre-Vatican II Catholicism).

However, what these authors dismiss is that their own thinking owes much to popular Spinozism. In fact, the 1789 French Revolution has launched an opposition between those that use the deism of the 17th-century as a fuel to accelerate the process of

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[527] René Guénon, *Le Régne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 53: "Si nous considérons l'ensemble de ce domaine de manifestation qu'est notre monde, nous pouvons dire que, à mesure qu'elles s'éloignent de l'unité principielle, les existences y deviennent d'autant moins qualitatives et d'autant plus quantitatives."

[528] Henry Corbin, "The Paradoxe of Monotheism," trans. Matthew Evans-Cockle, Les Amis de Corbin, accessed on the 01.06.2019 : , https://www.amiscorbin.com/bibliographie/the-paradoxe-of-the-monotheism/: "This merits a comparison between the conception of the destiny of the Imago Dei according to the different theological schools of Christianity, that in any case advances the idea of natural religion and rights that the flood of historicism and dialectical sociology have long since swept away in the West."

modernity, such as Robespierre's Cult of the Supreme Being, and those that seek to enclose the deism of popular Spinozism in an exoteric religious form (Catholicism in the nineteenth century and Islam in the twentieth century) against this same acceleration of modernity. This was the case of the Martinist and ultramontanist Martinist Franz-Joseph Molitor and his late French Sufi heirs, who are examined in this dissertation. In this sense, French Sufi Perennialists strengthen the break that modern (or here post-Spinozist) conceptions of religions have made from premodern religiosities.

Yet, is Ibn 'Arabī's *Christianization* and *Hermetization* the price that needed to be paid by French Sufi Perennialists to bring Ibn 'Arabī's name into modern times?

If this is the case, how are we to understand the theopolitics of modernity of which French Sufi Perennialism is an expression?

Are the theopolitics of modernity an intensification of a Christian episteme as Leo Strauss argues in several of his publications? Or is it the return of a theocosmic worldview, deeply influenced by the rediscovery of Hermeticism in the eighteenth century and set against the mosaic distinction between true and false religions as it has been defended by Jan Assmann in his famous article on the mosaic distinction[529]?

I first gather the main findings of this dissertation. Second, I separately discuss Assmann and Strauss's positions on the theopolitics of modernity in light of the results of my investigations on the episteme of French Sufi Perennialists. Finally, I sketch the historical limits of this dissertation and how it can be further developed by presenting Bloch's views on the Italian and German Renaissance.

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[529] Jan Assmann, "The Mosaic Distinction: Israel, Egypt, and the Invention of Paganism," *Representations* 56 (1996): 48-67.

7.1 GATHERING THE FINDINGS OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation seeks to answer two questions with regard to the establishment of a strong French Sufi Perennialist doctrine in the twentieth century.

1. How is the name of Ibn 'Arabī included in the Perennialist's theopolitical views; that is, how is their conceptualization of the relationship between God's utmost unity, God's law, and the Perfect Human Being portrayed?

2. What are the European traditions used by the scholars here studied to integrate Ibn 'Arabī in their theopolitical worldviews?

I start by answering the first question:

1. How is the name of Ibn 'Arabī included in their respective theopolitical views; that is, how is their conceptualization of the relationship between God's Unity, God's Law, and the Perfect Human Being portrayed?

I have answered the first question by analyzing how Francophone Sufi Perennialists have sewn the concepts of God's sovereignty together with God's law and God's Perfect Human Being while presenting the reality of what they thought "Sufism" was and more specifically the spirituality ascribed to the school of Ibn 'Arabī.

All European authors see the law as an exoteric totality that must be overcome by the reality of the Perfect Human Being who has attained the knowledge of the hidden god. This act of overcoming a given totality implies that the divinity is split in two: one half is hidden and is above all different religions and wisdom while the other is only a personalized aspect of the hidden Godhead and is prayed to by common Muslims. The Perfect Human Being, as understood by Perennialist authors, realizes his perfection of overcoming the law by erasing the opposition of opposites (hidden Godhead vs.

personalized divinity; esotericism vs. exotericism) at their middle point and then extending their identity over their respective previous distinct singularities.

They then drag the name of Ibn 'Arabī into these specific modern theopolitical frames by erasing from his name the epistemology taught by his stepson Qūnawī. Qūnawī taught that the Perfect Human Being is the one who sets the law into motion so as to resolve the distance between the opposites and dualities that structure our daily experience of this transient world without ever stipulating that these need to be overcome in an ontological third reality. Of all these oppositions, the one that is fundamental to our existence is the opposition between our eternal essence and the manifested realities of ourselves that we experience in this world. Furthermore, God's sovereignty is such that it calls for humanity to apply in life Muhammad's law to realize the reality of the empty and unsymbolizable middle point between humanity's eternal essence and its existence on this earth. Once this has been accomplished, humanity fully experiences God's sovereignty upon its immutable essence and is no more lost in the diffractive and dispersive powers of its worldly existence.

Against a similar approach that transcendentalizes the Islamic truths procedures, Perennialist authors—especially Valsan—have shaped a neo-Hermetic Islamic that is, incorrectly, based on the teachings of the pre-modern mystic Ibn Sab'in but ascribed by these modern authors to Ibn 'Arabī.

For Ibn Sab'īn, the transcendental truth is Hermetic and above the truths that belong to the Islamic faith. Moreover, Valsan then constructs an esoteric meta-layer of truth that he identifies with what he thinks are the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī. He lays this constructed esoteric meta-layer of truth over the construction of an "exoteric" form of

Islam, Freemasonry and European Hermeticism. However, the modern aspect of French Sufi Hermeticists is that, rather than looking for a chain of mediations that leads to the knowledge of Hermes, they seek to directly and immediately access the hidden world of symbols.

The relative success of French Perennialism in the Arab world is due to its Aristotelian language that is also found in the writings of the Naḥḍah. Subsequently, this success is also due to a process of reverse orientalism. However, the meeting between French Perennialism and Arab scholars who are friendly to French Sufi Perennialism, such as 'Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, rests on a misunderstanding. In fact, Mahmūd denies any truthful character in regard to the absolutization of the doctrine of the unicity of existence, as found in the works of Ibn Sab'īn. Rather, Mahmūd encourages a moderate understanding of this doctrine. The absolute version of the doctrine of the unity of existence differs from the moderate version of it by depriving all that is not Allah from any existence and by finding in Al-Fārābī 's philosophy a confirmation of its own doctrine. The moderate version of this same doctrine affirms that all that is not Allah receives a borrowed existence from God.

2. What are the European traditions used by the scholars studied in this dissertation to integrate Ibn 'Arabī in their theopolitical worldviews?

The para-masonic Christian esotericism known as Martinism with its Christian Kabbalistic, Post Sabbateist, and later occultist tendencies is the main tradition that informs the theopolitics of French Sufi Perennialism. Established in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it has systematized the two main assumptions of popular Spinozism;

that is, God's nature necessarily manifests its whole reality throughout existence and the docetic Christology that sees Christ as a magical image of God.

I have shown in each chapter how the main ideas of French Sufi Perennialists have been first expressed by the Martinist and Catholic Kabbalist Franz-Joseph Molitor (1779-1860).

Guénon's notions of the true man and the perfect or universal man is akin to Molitor's notions of the great man and the universal man. For both authors, the true/great man is the one who has become one with the universal intellect outside of this world while the universal man is the one who has come back to the concrete existence of this world and thus possesses the divine power to lead this world toward its spiritual and political perfection.

Michel Valsan insists that although the doctrine of the bloody sacrifice of the primordial man and the Perfect Human Being is not explicitly found in the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, it is necessary to find this teaching inside the oeuvre of the Andalusian mystic. A striking similar doctrine of the sacrifice of the universal man can also be found in Molitor's writings.

Finally, Corbin's docetic views on the reality of the Perfect Human Being bear a strong resemblance to Molitor's words that depict Christ's presence in the flesh as a magical act projected by God the father on to the world.

What French Sufi Perennialism retrieves from Molitor's Post Sabbatian worldview is foremost the conviction that the perfect tradition is enclosed inside each subaltern tradition. The subaltern tradition is a closed reality that has the contours of a law. Moreover, the universality of the tradition that is perceived as perfect is precisely

such because the center of all the subalternized traditions constantly hints toward its perfection.

The drive that animates French Sufi Perennialists' desire to refashion Ibn 'Arabī's spirituality and, more generally, Islam is sexual. Both Guénon and Valsan tend to feminize Islam and Judaism to transform its teachings to fit the *masculinized* teachings of the Advaita Vedanta.

Finally, as I have shown in the last chapter, the neo-ultramontanist views of French Sufi Perennialists that seek to unite the spiritual and political power in the highest esoteric function of the sacerdotal cast also finds its root in Molitor's ultramontane Catholic politics.

The table below presents the link between the main theopolitical concepts of the authors studied in this dissertation (God's sovereignty, God's law and God's perfect human being), the intellectual traditions that have effectively informed their thoughts and finally the difference between their interpretations of these fundamental concepts of the authors and Qūnawī's views on the same matters.

	Single European traditions involved in the establishment of a French Sufi doctrine	**The most characteristic Sufi concepts refashioned by each French scholar**	**French Sufi rendering of the Sufi concept**	**Qūnawī's rendering of the same Sufi concept**
René Guénon	- Fin de siècle Catholicism - Fin de siécle occultism	Tawhid (God's unity)	It is the unicity of the universal self that is above all formal traditions and foremost above the personal divinity prayed to by common Muslims	It is the capacity of Muslims to gather all the multiple actions and awarenesses inside their immutable essence and under the sovereignty of the uncountable one, Ahad.
Michel Valsan	- Freemasonry as practiced by Christian readers of Guénon.	Perfect Human Being	The Perfect Human Being mirrors the sacrifice of the Primordial Man. The Primordial Man has undertaken a sacrifice through which from the metaphysical Unity of the Origin emanates his members that form the manifoldness of things sensed in this world. The Perfect Man reassembles	The Perfect Human Being is Muhammad, who is in the empty center of the circle of existence. No *coincidentia oppositorum* can be found in the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī and thus in those of his stepson.

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			through a bloody sacrifice the opposites inside his original Unity that now overcomes their respective singularities.	
Henry Corbin	- Significatio passiva (the young Luther) - Theology of the cross vs. theology of glory (the young Luther)	The revealed Law	Each revealed law exists to show men their ugliness and needs thus to be overcome.	The revealed law organizes the actions of the Sufi in such a way that he contemplates how God's wisdoms/rules organise the multplicity of His self-disclosures which make up the stuff of this world.

7.2 DISCUSSION OF ASSMANN'S MOSAIC DISTINCTION

The thesis that Assmann[530] defends in his paper on the Mosaic Distinction refers to the introduction by Moses of such notions as true religions and false religions established through the belief in a God that is entirely outside this world. This assertion departs from previous ancient polytheisms. For Assmann, a theocosmic religion first existed in which the divinities from one country can be translated into those of another country insofar as they obey the same cosmological function: "the sun god of one religion was easily equated to the sun god of another religion." Against this theocosmic vision of a world shared equally by all humans, Moses turns the rituals and beliefs of polytheism upside-down by making profane what was sacred (the eating of sacrificed animals, the destruction of statues).

Assmann then jumps into modern times to make the point that these acted against the mosaic distinction by cutting the mosaic revelation into two halves: the law that is a shell known by all people and a universal secret wisdom that is hidden inside this shell. The universal hidden wisdom translates and conveys original Egyptian wisdom in the language of the law that is followed by the Hebrews. In this sense, the mosaic distinction loses its revolutionary power and is included into a modern theocosmic worldview in which a given revelation of one country can be translated into the terms of revelation of another country. Here, Assmann conveys two forefathers of French Sufi Perennialism that have defended a similar point of view on early Judaism: John Spencer (1630-1693) and Athanius Kircher (1602-1680). The rediscovery of the Hermetic tradition in the

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[530] Jan Assmann, "The Mosaic Distinction: Israel, Egypt, and the Invention of Paganism," *Representations* 56 (1996): 48-67.

eighteenth century returns the axiomatic fundament of an all-embracing theocosmic view to the European culture: As God is the essence that is beyond all that exists, all the names that are ascribed to him can be translated into one another without ever reaching God's essence.

With the return of Napoleon from Egypt to France, modernity rediscovered Egyptian cosmotheism against the mosaic distinction: "But it was only on the eve of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt that the return of Egyptian cosmotheism and the abolition of the mosaic distinction assumed the dimensions of a sweeping revolution. One might call it the 'return of the repressed.'"

Assmann's views on Modern Hermeticism as an attempt to include Judaism in a theocosmic worldview and erase its original revolutionary practice of refusing to be translated into a polytheistic *weltanschaung* is of interest for this dissertation. Namely, if this is the heart of the theopolitical practice of modernity, than French Sufi Perennialism should be labelled mainly as an expression of the rediscovery of Hermetic theocosmic traditions in the Renaissance. However, this is not precisely the case. French Sufi Perennialism does not only understand the law of a given tradition as a shell that covers a universal wisdom but also as a totality that must be overcome by the Perfect Human Being. How is this done?

The Christian dogma identifies Christ with the second Adam that redeems the first Adam by overcoming the law of Moses through his sacrifice on the cross. In the same way, when Guénon deals with Sufism, he applies this specific Christian dogma to Islamic teachings:

Dans le symbolisme de la croix, la première de ces deux réalisations est représentée par le développement indéfini de la ligne horizontale, et la seconde par celui de la ligne verticale; ce sont, suivant le langage de l'ésotérisme islamique, les deux sens de l'« ampleur » et de l'« exaltation », dont le plein épanouissement se réalise dans l'« Homme Universel », qui est le Christ mystique, le « second Adam » de saint Paul.[531]

A modern Hermetic theocosmic worldview understands the law as both the exoteric shell of the different traditions and as the manifestations of the order of the cosmos. Nonetheless, if both of these understandings are present in French Sufi Perennialist teachings, the dynamic of French Sufi Perennialists' thinking is such that it underlines the necessity for the perfect man to overcome the exoteric shell by acknowledging that *he* establishes and is the very order of the cosmos.[532]

7.3 DISCUSSION OF LEO STRAUSS'S INSIGHTS ON THE CHRISTIAN THEOPOLITICAL FRAME OF MODERNITY

How are we then to understand the Christian dimension of Hermetic modern theopolitics?

According to Strauss, the main difference between Christian theopolitical theories and Jewish and Islamic ones lies in the relationship between revelation and philosophy. The content of the sacred doctrine is given in a Christian context by a set of axioms that need to be believed in, while in a Jewish and Islamic context, it is given by a set of laws that need to be observed and the meanings of which have to be constantly discussed.

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[531] René Guénon, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1964), 98.
[532] René Guénon, *Les Etats Multiples de l'Etre* (Paris: Editions Tredaniel, 1984), 106.

In the history of European Christianity, Scholastics have given a rational coherence to the fundamental set of beliefs by blending revelation and reason. In this sense, a Christian philosophy is one in which the principle of faiths is approached from a philosophical point of view. This also means that the laws of men are given rationally and must be found in the minds of every man. European modernity then starts when consciousness is emancipated from the scholastic views on the primary awareness of moral principles. For Strauss:

> Conscience is much more frequently mentioned, say, in Rousseau, than it would be in an earlier age. Why? Not that conscience was not known and spoken about, but in the Thomistic teaching, Thomas makes the distinction between the primary awareness of moral principles, which he calls *synderesis* (a word which has disappeared from usage) and conscience. The conscience, we can say roughly—but you must correct me, Rabbi Weiss—the conscience is the application of what the *synderesis* says to a particular case: Did I act rightly now? [This includes] approving, disapproving, whatever it may be. Note now the interesting thing is that this practical part of the whole consisting of *synderesis* and conscience becomes emancipated. Do you see? I mean, the conscience remains without the *synderesis*, that's what one could say, and therefore new theories of the conscience are required.[533]

In this sense, European modernity sees the emancipation of philosophy from religion as an emancipation of consciousness from the *synderesis*.

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[533] Leo Strauss, Rousseau, "Rousseau, *(1962)*" Transcript of the 15th session given in 1962, published in *Leo Strauss Transcripts*, http://leostrausstranscripts.uchicago.edu/navigate/5/15/?byte=1499407.

Furthermore, with Strauss we can also argue that modernity develops a relation to religion similar to the relation premodern hermerticists held to religion.

In a study of a text, the Book of the Kuzari written by the Jewish thinker Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), Strauss shows the inner contradictions of hermetic philosophies. In fact, philosophy as such investigates the order of being and of the perfect society while claiming that its discourse does not belong to the flesh of humanity or the city in which its discourse is uttered. It then sees all religions as equals, since all of them are tales that can be used to convey the right order of being to the masses. How does then the philosopher escape from this contradiction between his conviction that philosophy knows what the perfect city is and the impossibility for the philosopher to embedd his political philosophy in the life of one single city? According to Strauss:

> Since the religion of the philosopher's own admission, is exchangeable with
> any other religions, the beliefs contained in the religion of the philosopher
> cannot be identical with the philosophic teaching. It is exoteric because
> of the rhetorical, dialectical or sophistical character of some of the argument
> supporting it; it is, at the best, a likely tale.[534]

In other words, the truth of the philosopher is obtained through a philosophical way of thinking that needs to be exoterically expressed though the irrational "tales" of religion. Strauss's critique of philosophy references here a critique uttered by Maimonides against the Sabeans, a pre-Islamic community mentioned in the Qur'an and

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[534] Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the 'Kuzari,'" *Proceeding of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 13 (1943): 47-96.

of which not much is known. Though, what is known, is their wide use of Hermetic traditions.[535] Strauss writes:

> Yet, as Maimonides does not fail to point out, their willingness to assert the reality of the most strange things which are impossible by "nature," is itself very strange; for they believed in the eternity of the world, i.e., they agreed with the philosophers over the adherents of revelation as regards the crucial question.[536]

Secular modernity, in Straussian words, can then be understood, in the context of this dissertation, as the continuation of a) the belief in a universal truth beheld by Hermetic philosophies that sees religions as pre-philosophical irrational tales and b) scholasticism with its downsizing of revelation and uplifting a mélange between philosophy and revelation such that philosophy ultimately needs to emancipates itself from revelation (in the same way that consciousness emancipates itself from the *synderesis*).

How then does Islamic or Jewish thinking (e.g, Maimonides, Avicenna, Al-Al-Fārābī) differ from modern attempts to practice philosophy inside a Christian cultural context according to Strauss?

Revelation in the Jewish-Islamic context is understood as the urgency with which revelation falls on its prophets and implores them to act ethically toward those who share a similar humanity without entering the question of the philosophical causes of this order. Wolfson synthetizes Strauss's understanding of "revelation" as follows:

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[535] Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 90.
[536] Strauss, "The law of reason in the 'Kuzari,'" *Proceeding of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 13 (1943): 47-96.

Strauss notes that the experience of revelation is "not a kind of self-experience" or the "actualization of a human potentiality," but it is "something undesired, coming from the outside, going against man's grain. It is the only awareness of something absolute which cannot be relativized in any way as everything else."[537]

Strauss defends the idea that premodern Islamic thinking (as understood here by Strauss; this is to say Avicenna, Averroes, and Al-Fārābī) is the result of an inner tension between a law that impels an ethical action here and now (revelation) and a rational attempt to give a personal meaning to existence, thus conducting it toward the contemplation of the one.[538] For Strauss:

> However one must or may decide the querelle des anciens et des modernes; it is established that for medieval philosophy, in contrast to modern philosophy, not only is the recognition of the authority of the revelation a "self-evident presupposition," but the "philosophic justification" of this recognition is an essential desideratum . . . medieval (Islamic and Jewish) philosophy differs specifically from both *ancient and modern philosophy* in that, understanding itself as both bound and authorized by revelation, it sees as its first and most pressing concern the foundation of philosophy as a legal foundation of philosophy.[539]

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[537] Elliott R. Wolfson, *Giving Beyond the Gift, Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 23.

[538] Leora Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135.

[539] Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law, Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, trans. Eve Adler (Albany: State University Press, 1995), 55 and 60. Emphasis is mine.

This tension is never resolved by an attempt to mingle philosophy and revelation so as to philosophically (and I should add hermetically) overcome the revealed law. *Or, in other words, the first moral principles are not to be found rationally inside man's consciousness, as it was the case for Scholasticism. Rather, the revealed Law is always outside of man's consciousness and it is precisely from this heteronomical position that the Law[540] establishes in man's heart the first moral principles.*

Can this difference of views - Modern Christian downsizing revelation and uplifting a mélange of these two regimes of truths vs. Islamic premodernity's (e.g, Avicenna, Al-Al-Fārābī, Averroes) strengthening the tension between revelation and philosophical contemplation - help us draw a difference between Qūnawī's premodern use of the dialectic revelation/its rationalization and Guénon's modern use of this same dialectic?

7.3.1 TESTING LEO STRAUSS'S VIEWS ON MODERN THEOPOLITICAL VIEWS ON THE DIALECTIC REVELATION/HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY IN FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALIST AND QŪNAWĪ'S PHILOSOPHIES

For Qūnawī, the Qur'an plays the role of the speech that links the distances of the relationships between the ineffable One and the immutable essences. Qūnawī uses the metaphor of ink to describe the cloud or divine breath in which all existant things lie latent as letters. Shaker presents Qūnawī's thoughts on this matter with these words:

The ontic "realities of the possible entities" are like the letters that lie latent in the inkwell in a state which Qūnawī earlier alluded to in connection with the secret of the words "God was and nothing was with Him" whereby "nothing in the divine

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[540] see also Gregory Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 119.

hiddenness of the essence has any existential multiplicity or specificity."[541]

These letters need to be organized in a divine manner that corresponds to the "higher" knowledge, according to Qūnawī, that God gives of Himself in the Qur'an:

> Qūnawī found [this] in the theorization content that was either transmitted on authority or received experientially in the form of "Lordly inspirations" directly from the wayfarer's lordly source. In this enterprise, the canonical text of the Qur'an was primordial, present as the instructive primary root. Insofar as it was articulated speech, it came nearest to God's knowledge of himself for a specific time, being in short what God has said about himself. In this manner, it acted to regulate all reflective, interpretative efforts.[542]

If the Sufi relies only on his intuitive power of the intellect to seize the invisible order of unmanifested and manifested things, he gains a taste of the knowledge of God's essence but not a truthful knowledge of it. Qūnawī explains that it is through the muhammadian law that the Sufi comes to know "the foundations of the rules/wisdoms, the divines presences as well as the secret of the specch of the Real (God)"[543].

By beholding his immutable essence under the authority of the Sharīʿah, he gets to know the ineffable One who gives the (from a Muslim standpoint) most perfect knowledge of its essence through the revelation sent down on Muhammad, who is the universal connector of all connections that regulates the distance between opposites by applying God's rules. This is the leap of faith that is required by the disciple of Qūnawī.

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[541] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (Lac-des-Iles, QC: Xlibris, 2012), 256.
[542] Anthony Shaker, *Thinking in the language of Reality* (Xlibris: Montreal, 2012), 148.
[543] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *Ijaz fi-l Bayan Tafsīr Umm al Qur'an* (Beyrouth: Kitab al Ilmiyah, 2005), 308.

The relationship between revelation and knowledge of God is different for our modernist Spinozist authors.

For Guénon (and Spinoza), the revelation of a discourse, such as the Qur'an, is a lower faculty of knowledge, as it is still tied to imagination and thus belongs to the formal religion and not to the universal one that is beyond all the different formal religions. When understood in a higher sense, inspiration refers to the intellectual intuition by which one gains the knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* of his soul, God, and the world.

Guénon writes in a footnote,

Il doit être bien entendu que, si nous employons ici le mot de « révélation » au lieu de celui d'« inspiration », c'est pour mieux marquer la concordance des différents symbolismes traditionnels, et que d'ailleurs, comme tous les termes théologiques, il est susceptible d'une transposition dépassant le sens spécifiquement religieux qu'on lui donne d'une façon exclusive en Occident.[544]

He downsizes "revelation" as a theological understanding that is less perfect than a metaphysical "inspiration" or "intuition." In this sense, revelation serves only as an education for the disciple who has not gone beyond the formal religion.

Once the disciple has become one with the universal intellect, he is empowered to rule over the society of the cycle of existence that follows our present condition on Earth.

Le centre, seul point restant immobile dans ce mouvement de rotation, est, en raison même de son immobilité (image de l'immutabilité principielle), le moteur de la « roue de l'existence »; il renferme en lui-même la « Loi » (au sens du

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[544] René Guénon, *Symboles de la Science sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 147, footnote 3.

terme sanscrit Dharma), c'est-à-dire l'expression ou la manifestation de la

« Volonté du Ciel ».[545]

For Guénon, the term universal reflects the intellect that encompasses the whole of the reality, while for Qūnawī, above the universal intellect lies the root of the Sharīʿah, which is above even the immutable essences.

I have stated above that, along with Strauss, we can distinguish a modern Christian theopolitical practice of thought from an Islamic premodern one (e.g, Qūnawī). A modern theopolitical view, such as expressed by Guénon's philosophy of religion, derives from a Hermetic tradition and from a scholastic tradition. When based on the former, it takes the view that religions are "tales" that are used to convey the esoteric truths only known by the Hermetic philosopher to the masses. Based on the latter, it actualizes its act of downsizing revelation (as a law and as a set of beliefs) under a perpetual rationalization of its content. On the contrary, a premodern Islamic framework (as understood by Strauss with reference to Avicenna, Al-Fārābī , and Averroes) is moved by the inner tension between the law (and its ethical orders) and the philosophical attempt to rise a personal existence toward the contemplation of the one. For Guénon and Qūnawī, Hermeticism defines the philosophical practice of its thoughts. Nonetheless, for Guénon, Hermetic thinking overcomes the Islamic revelation, while for Qūnawī, it is sublated under the root of the Sharīʿah and is always in creative tension with its prescriptive heteronomical reality.

7.3.2 LOCATING FRENCH SUFI PERENNIALISM'S GENERAL EPISTEME IN LEO STRAUSS'S "THE THREE WAVES OF MODERNITY"

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[545] René Guénon, *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1996), 184.

I intend in the following pages to locate French Sufi Perennialism inside the three waves of modernity, as described by Leo Strauss in his paper *The Three Waves of Modernity* (1975).[546] Leo Strauss defines modernity as the process that has destroyed the foundation of premodern anthropology. In premodern anthropology, humanity is defined by the intellectual and political end it strives to achieve. In this sense, what ought to be serves the purpose of being an antagonist to the present order of things and the fuel that pushes it toward its moral perfection.

Modernity starts with Machiavelli, where man is no better understood as being defined by the intellectual end toward which each person's life is driven but rather as a manipulatable individual. It is Lady Fortuna who determines history:

> What Machiavelli calls the imagined commonwealths of the earlier writers is based on a specific understanding of nature which he rejects, at least implicitly. According to that understanding, all natural beings, at least all living beings, are directed towards an end, a perfection for which they long; there is a specific perfection which belongs to each specific nature; there is especially perfection of man which is determined by the nature of man as the rational and social animal. Nature supplies the standard, a standard wholly independent of man's will; this implies that nature is good.[547]

The second wave of modernity starts with Rousseau, for whom the difference between what is and what ought to be can be overcome when the will of the individual

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[546] Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1975), 81-98.
[547] Strauss, 81-98.

meets the general will. This meeting between the individual and the general will then substitutes the premodern conception of the natural order.

> Modernity started from the dissatisfaction with the gulf between the is and the ought, the actual and the ideal; the solution suggested in the first wave was to bring the ought nearer to the is by lowering the ought, by conceiving of the ought as not making too high of demands on men, or as being in agreement with man's most powerful and most common passion; in spite of this lowering, the fundamental difference between the is and the ought remained; even Hobbes could not simply deny the legitimacy of the appeal from the is, the established order, to the ought, the natural or moral law. Rousseau's concept of the general will which, as such, cannot err—which by merely being is what it ought to be— showed how the gulf between the is and the ought can be overcome.[548]

Finally, the third wave of modernity starts with Nietzsche. Since the general will is nowhere to be found, he radicalizes the idea that humanity, as such, cannot exist, as history has shown different ways of being human. In this sense, the ideal that fashions a given society can be only the result of an aristocracy that postulates a mythical era and enforces it in society: "All ideals are the outcome of human creative acts, of free human projects that form that horizon within which specific cultures were possible; they do not order themselves into a system; and there is no possibility of a genuine synthesis of them."[549]

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[548] Strauss, 81-98.
[549] Strauss, 81-98.

With Nietzsche, then, the premodern conception of a natural order that pushes persons toward their intellectual perfection is fully destroyed. Along with this destruction, the idea that they are able to politically organize society in the best way possible according to the intellectual end they strive to achieve is entirely erased from the modern consciousness.

Nietzsche's views have, historically at least, grounded fascist politics. Since, history cannot teach us the right historical model, it is the task of the overman to actualize the whole of his potentialities in whichever society he lives. This can be done first by destroying the present world, then by building the new world under his supervision: "The theory of liberal democracy, as well as of communism, originated in the first and second waves of modernity; the political implication of the third wave proved to be fascism."[550]

The difference between the modern French Sufi interpretation of the perfect man and Qūnawī's interpretation of this same doctrine amounts to this fascist answer to the modern crisis. The perfect man as conceived by the French Sufi Perennialists is the one who has the power to make the destruction of this world happen and brings his aristocratic elects in the new cycle of existence. I intend to illustrate this statement in the following paragraphs.

A certain anxiety runs through the Francophone Sufi cults driven by the study of Guénon's texts. Are they able to build in their lodge the masonic Celestial Jerusalem of the end of times?

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[550] Strauss, 81-98.

When the destruction of our present world is complete, they would have the power to enter the next cycle of existence by living inside the Celestial Jerusalem built in their lodge. In Guénon's words:

> voici la description de la *Jérusalem Céleste*, telle qu'elle est figurée dans le *Chapitre des Souverains Princes Rose-Croix*, de *l'Ordre de Heredom de Kilwinning* ou *Ordre Royal d'Écosse*, appelés aussi *Chevaliers de l'Aigle et du Pélican*: « Dans le fond (de la dernière chambre) est un tableau où l'on voit une montagne d'où découle une rivière, au bord de laquelle croît un arbre portant douze sortes de fruits. Sur le sommet de la montagne est un socle composé de douze pierres précieuses en douze assises. Au-dessus de ce socle est un carré en or, sur chacune des faces duquel sont trois anges avec les noms de chacune des douze tribus d'Israël. Dans ce carré est une croix, sur le centre de laquelle est couché un agneau[2]. » C'est donc le symbolisme apocalyptique que nous retrouvons ici.[551]

The perfect man in the French Sufi Perennialist's view is thus the the one who is the bridge between the utter destruction of this world and the next golden cycle of existence:

> Tout brille après son rayonnement (en réfléchissant sa clarté); c'est par sa clarté que ce tout (l'individualité intégrale) est illuminé. Ce *Purusha* est d'une luminosité (spirituelle) claire comme une flamme sans fumée; il est le maître du passé et du

[551] René Guénon, *L'Esoterisme de Dante* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 26. This masonic interpretation of the celestial Jerusalem appears in a Valsanian tone inside the Islamic text by Paolo Urizzi, Il Salvatore Escatologico in ambito islamico, l'Imam atteso e il Cristo della seconda venuta, in Avallon, L'Uomo e il sacro, n. 52, 2003: "ciò a cui tutti questi" aḥadīth fanno allusione è in realtà il periodo millenario del vero Sanctum Regnum, regno che non è certo di "questo mondo," anche se comporta la discesa sulla terra della "Gerusalemme celeste." For a beautiful historical investigation of the beliefs in the Celestial Jerusalem by the very first Jewish converts to Islam, see Ofer Livne-Kafri, "Jerusalem in Early Islam: The Eschatological Aspect," *Arabica*, T.53, Fasc. 3 (July 2006): 382-403.

futur (étant omniprésent); il est aujourd'hui et il sera demain (et dans tous les cycles d'existence) tel qu'il est (de toute éternité). »[552]

In another passage, we read:

Il en est encore ainsi quand on considère la fin même du cycle: au point de vue particulier de ce qui doit alors être détruit, parce que sa manifestation est achevée et comme épuisée, cette fin est naturellement « catastrophique » au sens étymologique où ce mot évoque l'idée d'une « chute » soudaine et irrémédiable; mais d'autre part, au point de vue où la manifestation, en disparaissant comme telle, se trouve ramenée à son principe dans tout ce qu'elle a d'existence positive, cette même fin apparaît au contraire comme le « redressement » par lequel, ainsi que nous l'avons dit, toutes choses sont non moins soudainement rétablies dans leur « état primordial ».[553]

With the following words, Guénon invites the constitution of a European Sufi Perennialist elite, the theopolitical discourses of which and treatment of Ibn ʿArabī's name I have dismantled in this dissertation:

L'élite dont nous parlons, si elle parvenait à se former pendant qu'il en est temps encore, pourrait préparer le changement de telle façon qu'il se produise dans les conditions les plus favorables, et que le trouble qui l'accompagnera inévitablement soit en quelque sorte réduit au minimum; mais, même s'il n'en est pas ainsi, elle aura toujours une autre tâche, plus importante encore, *celle de contribuer à la*

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[552] René Guénon, *Recueil* (London: Rose-Cross Books, 2013), 44.
[553] René Guénon, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 271.

conservation de ce qui doit survivre au monde présent et servir à l'édification du monde future.[554]

In this sense, French Sufi Perennialists answer the crisis of modernity not by a straussian liberal oriented study of premodern political philosophies but with a strong modern appeal: Make the new world happen here and now through the full destruction of the present world for the fate of a happy few initiated elects. As Strauss argues, one of the common but nonetheless accurate interpretations of modernity is described as follows:

> According to a very common notion, modernity is secularized biblical faith; the other-worldly biblical faith has become radically this-worldly. Most simply: *not to hope for life in heaven but to establish heaven on earth by purely human means*.[555]

This is quite different from Qūnawī's perspective, which invites us to strive for our intellectual end while becoming a connector of all connections—that is, the perfect man is the empty middle between all the oppositions without ever erasing their singularities. That is the Perfect Man is the junction between the opposites.

> The reality of God which is named Huwiya (God's ipseity) is realized in the junction between what is external and internal, as God says, "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden" (Qur'an 57:3). This verse refers to the station of his ipseity that is in the middle between the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. It is the same meaning that stands behind Muhammad's first qibla being Jerusalem and, later, the holy house (Kaaba stone

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[554] René Guénon, *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 188. Emphasis is mine.
[555] Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81-98.

in Mecca): "Say: To God belong the East and the West. He guides whom he wants on a straight path" (Qur'an 2:142). The middle is between the East and the West, as the following verse states: "We have appointed you as a community of the middle" (Qur'an 2:143). The West is the external world, while the East refers to what is hidden. The middle is for him (God). The person who has reached the middle is free from all bonds and perceives the secret of God's carefulness and of his being-with her [humanity] . . . In this station there is no "where," no "since," no "until" If you closely examine this station, you will

know what characterizes Islam.[556]

It is true that Qūnawī mentions that this world will finish, once it has no more poles to hold its structural oppositions.[557] However, we find no haste for this world to be finished in his words. Moreover, this statement is not made with the intense desire to establish a Celestial Jerusalem here and now.

Yet, before the hypothetical end of this world, it seems that Qūnawī's invitation to become a mediator between opposites might well closely resonate with Souleymane Bachir Diagne's encouragement to establish a "lateral universal" in a postcolonial world that functions as a translatory device between different cultural, religious, and political ways of world-making.

The open ended process of translation that lateral universal requires, because my point of departure is the language that I speak, which is one among many, demands that we avoid both fragmentation and reduction to the One. That way of

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[556] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl Umm al-Kitāb* (Beyrouth: Kitab al-Ilmiyah, 2005), 233.

[557] Ibrahīm Niasse, *The Removal of Confusion Concerning the Flood of the Saintly Seal Ahmad al-Tijani,* trans. Abdullai i-Okene, Mukhtar Holland, Zanchary Wright (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 157.

caring about the universal in a world liberated from the assumption of a universal grammar and the narrative of a unique telos.[558]

7.4 THE HISTORICAL LIMITS OF THIS DISSERTATION (ON ERNST BLOCH'S CONFERENCE ON THE RENAISSANCE)

I have stopped my desire to find the historical roots of the general episteme of French Sufi Perennialism in the seventeenth century of popular Spinozism.

Nonetheless, the fundamental question of this general episteme ("how can, from an unlimited, indeterminate first principle appear a being that is determinated?") probably finds its first expression in the social milieu of the Italian Catholic bourgeoisie of the Renaissance, as it has been best described by Ernst Bloch. The disruption of feudalism brings forth the figure of the merchant who inspires the invention of new technologies to increase his capital and encourages the bank to secure it. The emergence of the merchant as the leading figure of society carries with it the discovery of "*new human powers*" that were until then never actualized.[559] The second discovery is the emergence of the feeling that there must be something to explore far from one's land. This feeling of what is far away has pushed the adventurers, such as Magellan or Vasco de Gama, to go out to sea. The combination of both items, the hidden powers of men and the longing for what is far away, has pushed the bourgeoisie to build a philosophy that legitimates its task of overcoming the limitations and determinations of feudalism and its premodern Christian theology.

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[558] Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "On the Postcolonial and the Universal?," *Rue Descartes* 78, no. 2 (2013): 7-18.

[559] Ernst Bloch, *Vorlesung zur Philosophie der Renaissance* (Berlin: Surhkamp, 1972), 8: "*Im einzelnen Menschen werden Kräfte geahnt und Kräfte entdeckt, die bisher nicht gesehen worden waren*."

Among the authors of the Renaissance that are presented by Bloch; two come the closest to the popular Spinozist episteme that informs French Sufi Perennialism: Paracelsus and Jakob Böhme. Both belong to the German-speaking part of the Renaissance era.

When presenting the thoughts of the alchemist Paracelsus (1493-1541), Bloch argues that he has conveyed a philosophy in which man dives into the whole of nature to extract its higher essence. This promethean task is peculiar to a Renaissance mentality in which men find, through the abolition of feudalism, inner powers that were unknown before. The Paracelsian philosopher is then involved in a movement in which microcosm and macrocosm are no longer analogical but collide or mingle in each other,[560] and through their engulfment of each other, bring forth the healing power of nature.

The second author that is presented by Bloch and that is of interest for further research on the historical roots of the popular Spinozist general episteme is the mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1624). Bloch argues that Böhme inherits a popular reception of Manicheism that has survived extinction from the Catholic Church in 1209. Bloch follows his presentation of the German mystic by declaring that Böhme is the first modern dialectician. The dialectics that are invented here are those in which the oppositions are united. In fact, by meditating the origin of evil, the shoemaker contemplates the divine origin of evil: "*The Devil and God are explained in the way of an identity between opposites as the Devil pushes God inside a dialectic path.*"[561] The

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[560] Ernst Bloch, *Vorlesung zur Philosophie der Renaissance* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1972), 68: "*Paracelsus ist letzthin zwar gleichfalls pantheistisch, doch sein Pan ist unendlich und im Gemüt zugleich, unvollendeter Prometheus- Vulcanus des Menschen und der Natur, der im und durch den Menschen das »opus magnum« seines Gesundens vollbringt.*"

[561] Ernst Bloch, *Vorlesung zur Philosophie der Renaissance* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1972), 75: "*Teufel*

dialectic is set into movement by the inner quest of men who interiorize nature to reach the very source (*Urgrund*) of the Godhead.

Paracelsus dives into nature to fulfill its essence while Böhme establishes the identity between opposites to give evil an explanation that may satisfy the men of the Renaissance. The subjectivization of the nonhuman has the purpose of overcoming the determinations by nature and feodalism.

The perspective that had a long-lasting effect on French Sufi Perennialism is Böhme's vision of dualities as being identical in their essence in God's *urgrund*. Both Corbin and Guénon believed firmly that Böhme received a secret initiation, even though Guénon added that the shoemaker from Görlitz was unaware of the spiritual influence he received.[562]

I am hopeful that a next researcher will undertake the difficult task of studying the influence that the change of mentalities that occurred in the Italian and German Renaissance had on the birth of the epistemology of French Sufi Perennialism.

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und Gott werden als Identität der Gegensätze erklärt; denn der Teufel treibt erst Gott auf den dialektisch-prekären Weltweg."

[562] Xavier Accart, X., "Identité et théophanies René Guénon (1886-1951) et Henry Corbin (1903-1978)," *Politica Hermetica* - René Guénon, lectures et enjeux, 16 (2002): 176-200: "*Car les fidèles pouvaient se rattacher directement – verticalement – à l'Imam de par leur dévotion. Ils n'avaient pas besoin d'un rattachement à une lignée humaine. Il est intéressant que Guénon admettait cette possibilité à titre exceptionnel. Or, il l'illustrait par le cas de Jacob Boehme si cher à Corbin. Guénon notait que l'inconvénient était cependant que l'initié, n'ayant pas vraiment conscience de la nature de ce qu'il recevait, risquait de passer pour un mystique. Cela nous rappelait la définition qu'il avait donnée en 1921 de la théosophie.*"

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The translation of the Qur'an I refer to are the folllowing:

The Message of the Qur'an trans. Muhammad Asad (Sevilla: Dar al Andalus Limited, 1988).

The Glorious Qur'an, trans. Muhammad Tahir ul Qadri (Islamabad: Minhaj-ul Quran, 2012).